W. B. Yeats

Selected Poems

R. L. VARSHNEY

W. B. Yeats SELECTED POEMS

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W. B. YEATS
SELECTED POEMS

[A CRITICAL STUDY]

Edited with
General Introduction, Introduction to Poems,
Paraphrase, Notes, Explanations,
Questions & Answers, etc.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. THE AGE OF YEATS

The Social Background

The year 1890 marked a turning-point in the social and literary history of England. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the old compromise of the Victorian Era between emotion and rationalism, religion and science, ethics and logic began to break ; the values, the Victorians cherished, began to seem out-of-date. Everywhere there was craze for new things—new fashions, new trends, new styles, new morals, new norms were replacing the old order. The old order was changing giving place to the new order. There was complete breakdown of the agrarian way of life and economy. It meant the end of rural England, and the growth of urbanization and industrialization which increased modernization.

Rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization gave birth to new problems like congestion, shortage of houses, crime and sex-craze. The society became more and more individualistic and selfish. All these problems directly affected public morality, and created an atmosphere of moral perplexity and uncertainty. The rise of the scientific spirit and rationalism, led to a questioning of accepted social beliefs, conventions and traditions. The atmosphere of perplexity and bewilderment was further aggravated by the advances made in the sphere of psychology since the times of Freud. "The 20th century has for its characteristic to put everything in every sphere of life to the question, and secondly, in the light of this scepticism, to reform, to reconstruct—to accept the new age as new, and attempts to mould it by conscious, purposeful effort."—(R. A. Scott-James).

The First World War gave a powerful jolt to the authoritarian form of family relationship. The post-war reaction generated a tendency to look askance at all manifestations of authority. It may be characterized as an era of revolt against authority. Political and religious scepticism, general disillusionment, cynicism, irony, etc., became the order of the day. The dictum "power corrupts" symbolizes the revolt of the post-war generation. The temper of the age was anti-heroic, "action" and "success". in the worldly sense, were not regarded creditable achievement. Interest in "extrovert" shifted to "introvert".

The period after the First World War has been called the age of irresponsibility—the careless twenties, and the age of beautiful nonsense. The individual self was clinging desperately to his consciousness. They began in depression, continued in crisis, and ended in war. The poets turned from Freud to Marx, or from despair to the comforts of dogmatic Christianity, and on the whole the change was not good, for novelists either died, or turned to biography or history or criticism or silence.

Despite occasional revival Christianity even in extreme Catholic forms in the writings of T. S. Eliot and Graham Greene, the 20th century has witnessed a gradual weakening of religious faith in consequence of the march of science and rationalism. Religious controversies make little impact on public affairs ; moral and ethical virtues are no longer regarded as absolute. Philosophy and metaphysics do not discourse on the nature of man instead. To Freud, man is a biological phenomenon, a bundle of instincts and impulses.

The erosion of faith in traditional beliefs and values had driven writers to seek anchor from uncertainties and complexities in some "mystic religion of blood", and W. B. Yeats built up a personal system by a peculiar fusion of magic and occultism. Authoritarian systems have gained popularity on the continent, and Marxism advocating class war, won a large following even in England. Every period has its own dominant religion, and Marxist socialism has become the inspiration and dream of the early 20th century. It affected the social organization very greatly. The aristocracy ceased to be a force with the turn of the century. Social life has been taking long strides. Profit motive is considered inhuman and unholy. Merit and education command prestige instead of accident and birth and lineage. Social and economic problems are foremost in thought, and planned methods for development are preferred so that there may not exist extreme poverty side by side with extreme wealth. The quest for a system of design has led to the rise of Marxism and the concept of economic planning.

The Physical Background

In the modern age the tide of human fortune has swept along with incomparable force, its passage often unpredictable, now forwards, now backwards, breaking up old boundaries, obliterating ancient landmarks, opening up new campaigns, sometimes only to destroy them again. New ideas and new inventions, both for good and for evil, have transformed mankind. In fifty years, a whole new world, intellectual and physical, moral and aesthetic, political, social, and economic, has emerged

In the first decade of the century is the Indian summer of the old world ; in the second, comes the great storm ; in the third, a new world very unsteadily, but hopefully, emerges ; in the fourth, disillusion and decay prepare the way for the outbreak of the storm renewed with even more devastating violence ; in the fifth, when the storm is abated, again a new world seeks to arise with a determination more cautious, but even more dauntless.

The Political Background

The Boer War (1899-1902) was a turning-point in England's political life. It shattered the dream of security and progress that had soothed Englishmen since Waterloo (1815). The dominant political faith of the Victorian period was an imperial nationalism, and the alleged duty of an Englishman was to assume the white man's burden. The Boer War gave a rude shock to the complacent life and thinking of England. It revealed that the era of imperialism was coming to an end, and that England had friends in Europe, while Germany positively hated England.

In England itself things were not smooth. The Liberal Victory of 1905 showed stability and solidarity of English democracy, and promised an era of peace and reform. None-the-less, there came the suffragist agitation, the Coal Strike of 1912 ; and unrest in Ireland threatening mutiny and rebellion. Both in domestic and foreign affairs, England was faced with grave problems. Indians, under the able guidance and leadership of Gandhiji were demanding freedom from the British Rule.

Before the storm broke, in 1914, tremors shook the industrial and political surface of Britain. The sky darkened, but ordinary life still basked in the last golden rays, and young and old in hundreds of thousands greeted the war in Rupert Brooke's spirit of honour renewed and valour refreshed.

But optimism prevailed in the opening years of the second decade. When the war came in August, 1914, the poets greeted it as patriots sure of their cause. But later on they realized the futilities of war. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* appeared as early as 1922, and a vision of the twenties was created in the light of that poem which was rather a myth than the truth.

To quote G. S. Fraser, "One can think of the 1920's as a decade in which the English people as a whole were recovering from the shock of the First World War, and hoping desperately that things would get back to 'normal' ; to the material comfort and moral security of the Edwardian age, to the old Victorian confidence in the steady march of human progress. To the soldier the war had left something like a permanent scar on the mind. And to clever and sensitive people, the contemporary situation seemed a hopeless muddle, setting them for diversion and satisfaction rather in the interests and pleasure of private life."

Charles Core observes that "the world in which we live today can only be described as chaotic in the matter of religious beliefs." There are scepticism and doubt, apathy and indifference towards spiritual problems. This attitude of mind is conditioned by the cumulative effects of all those factors mentioned above. There is particular feeling of resentment against Christianity, especially, for it appears to have failed to carry out what it wanted to.

Now the scientists were the chief intellectuals whereas in the earlier periods theologians and philosophers had the popular imagination. Science was performing wonders. Competition was considered the force which would usher in an era of material prosperity. Material progress was visible everywhere. Spiritual values were on the decline.

The Literary Background

The modern age has been distinguished for a phenomenal rise in literacy. Books, periodicals, and newspapers are coming out in continuous abundance with the result that the spread of education has been very widespread. But it has ostensibly suffered in quality. The old culture of the people, mirrored in folk-music, dance and rural craft, has been annihilated, and cinema, radio and the popular literature, mostly termed the 'penny dreadfuls' because of their crime and love-stories, are regaling the people who unwittingly submit themselves to commercial exploitation. Vulgarity, brutality and coarseness are on the increase and man has become incapable of subtle and finer emotional responses, cinema, television and cheap novels have induced in the people a tendency to daydreaming, thus, making them less conscious of hard realities. This lowering of tastes has had an adverse effect on art and literature. Bad art and cheap literature called 'pot-boilers' have tarnished the face of the new age. The exploitation of the youth for commercial as well as for political ends has tended to invest them with make-believe sort of importance, and hence, the antagonistic confrontation between the old and the young has been sharpened. It has become a century of the revolt of youth. Experiments are being made in the field of music, art and literature, but all that hardly proves cultural fervour ; it rather indicates a breakdown of cultural continuity. It has to be seen how far the new age is reflected in the poetry of the day.

By 1890, most of the great writers of the Victorian age were either dead or had practically ceased to create. Much of what is traditional and Victorian still continues to influence the 20th century poetry which is a curious mixture of the traditional and experimental, of the old and the new.

The new era in poetry which commenced after the eclipse of the Victorian era is distinguished by the prolification of literary output. This abundance of output cannot be superior in quality, of course, its standard is low. Being a poetry of revolt against tradition, it contains much that is ephemeral and childish. In the words of a critic, "It is eccentric, wayward, puerile and commonplace, or an epidemic of intellectual and emotional diarrhoea." Nevertheless, some of the modern poets are outstandingly brilliant and their poems are of everlasting beauty and universal importance. Though not like the glorious period when poets like Tennyson and Browning lived and blazed the trail, it is still an age of great poetry. But the modern age is not the age of masters and their followers, each writer is his own master and model, and he produces poems of merit alongwith much that is trash. The peculiar vogue of the age is anthologies which bring out collections of poems by several authors in a single volume and presented to the reader for perusal and enjoyment.

In view of the developments outlined above, it is not surprising that for the first time in its history, the novel now became the dominant literary form in English. To a semieducated modern taste, prose fiction was, and still is, more palatable than poetry, which is a more sophisticated taste, while, by its nature, it is more accessible to the masses than drama. In addition, the novel is admirably suited as a vehicle for the sociological studies which attracted most of the great artists of the period.

After a hundred years of insignificance, drama again appears as an important literary form, and the thirty years under review see men of genius, who are also practical, experienced men of the theatre, creating a live and significant drama out of the problems of their age. Like the novelists, most of the important dramatists were chiefly concerned with contemporary social scene, and though, toward the end of the period, there are signs of a revival of poetic drama, prose is the normal medium.

Long before 1918 it had become obvious that in poetry, in the novel, and in drama the old traditional forms were outworn. Experimenters in all three fields were evolving new forms to sustain the new demands being made upon them. Progress is most rapid in the drama, but the novel too, in the hands of great masters, undergoes revolutionary changes, the importance of which is sometimes underestimated because they are overshadowed by more startling experiments, are less sensational, and the bulk of the poetry published is in the traditional manner. For the first time for many years poetry is the least significant of the important literary forms.

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2. THE CHIEF TRENDS IN ENGLISH POETRY IN THE AGE OF YEATS

Although there may not have existed great masters like Dante and Shakespeare, Milton and Homer, the age of Yeats is rich in poetry from both the viewpoints of matter and manner. Before we generalize about the general features, it would be more useful to make a brief historical survey of the English poetry of the respective periods.

The Decadents

During the 1890's an effort was made to keep alive the tradition of the Pre-Raphaelite poets, Swinburne, Morris and Rossetti. The poets of this period sought to imitate the overcloying sweetness and luxuriousness of their predecessors. They sought to escape from the world of machinery, industry and banal morality to the world of art. They followed the gospel of art for art's sake Ernest Dowson, Lionel

Johnson and Arthur Symons are the representative decadent poets. Here is a passage from Lionel Johnson :

> "Dear heavenly books !
> With kindly voices, winning looks,
> Enchant me with your spells of art
> And draw me homeward to your heart."

The Realists

Another current of poetry which flew between 1880 and 1900 may be termed the Realistic Poetry when compared to the Pre-Raphaelites and the Decadents. Willam Ernest Henley, Rudyard Kipling and Wilfrid S. Blunt are the representative poets of this current. But chief among them is Kipling. Some of these poets presented the ugliness of modern industrial civilization ; they used ugliness, meanness, etc., as the subjects of poetry.

> "As with varnish red and glistening
> Dripped his hair, his feet looked rigid ;
> Raised, he settled stiffly sideways
> You could see his hurts were spinal."

Kipling wrote on soldiers and sailors, and on imperialism also. Poetry of these poets has little or no metaphysical interest. "As a poet Kipling claims credit for reintroducing realism and racy vigour into the verse of the 'nineties.' At his best he achieves genuine poetry, at his worst he can be mechanically and stridently crude. He lacks delicacy of touch. He is a ceaseless experimenter in verse forms and rhythms, and his main themes are those of his prose works."

The Pessimists

The two great pessimistic poets of the nineties are Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman. They keep alive the spirit of questioning about sense and outward things and give a jolt to the feeling of self-complacency and cheap optimism of the Victorians. Their poetry is the final expression of the disillusionment which had been at work ever since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hardy "tells of tragic irony, of frustrated love, of passion followed by disillusion, misery by deceit, of a teasing woman who provokes tragedy, of lost faith." Hardy writes in harsh, prosaic diction and simple, often, stark metre. A. E. Housman deals in his poetry with primitive themes in musical language, with a sweetness broken by irony and the tang of cruel disillusion. Music comes to him under the stress of emotion, but it is controlled by his scholarly sense of metre. The three themes which attract him are soldiership, love and the gallows. His style is bleak and classical. "Hardy lived entrenched behind his sombre defences ; Housman was out in the open, serene amid the battle—undismayed because entirely without hope :

> 'I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun,
> But still, be still, my soul ; it is but for a season :
> Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.'

Hardy was too sensitive to be actively a rebel ; Housman too resolute in an heroic despair."—(A. C. Ward).

The Transitioual Poets

Robert Bridges (1844-1930) who succeeded Alfred Austin as a poet-laureate, in 1913, has to his credit quite an appreciable body of poetry most of which is of a high quality. "The beauties of nature, the charm of landscape in particular, the joy of romance of love, memories of an almost idyllic childhood, these are the themes which he treated with the good breeding and absence of passion demanded of a gentleman."—(E. Albert). An atmosphere of tranquillity spreads over his work. He is always serene ; feeling is contained in his verse rather than expressed by it. His emotion is "emotion recollected in tranquillity and this tranquil air is present in his landscape pieces also." Bridges shines as poet of nature also. His most distinguished contribution is in the field of prosody.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was at the centre of the Irish Literary movement and was indispensable to its existence. He was a poet and a dramatist, and all his creative work is marked with fine poetic touches. He harnessed his pen in the service of poetry for nearly fifty years, and "in fifty years he evolved from a dreamer to a realist, and from a realist to a passionate metaphysical seer. Thought and passion drove him all his life. He was a poet all the time, and a great poet."—(Dr. A. S. Collins).

The other notable transitional poets are Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948) and Francis Thompson (1860-1907). Bottomley wrote romantic poems with a marked influence of Rossetti. As A. C. Ward says, "Reading his poems we see him developing from within outward, using as the raw material of his experience what has come to him from literature, legend, myth, and investing the life that he does see around him with quality of legend and myth, showing man in the round, larger than life, more heroic or more villainous, more elemental." His poems are also remarkable for their images, visibility and sound effects. William Watson, another poet, also helped in bringing about a transition in poetry.

The Georgian Poets

Georgian poetry covers the period from 1910 to 1935 when George V was the King presiding over the destinies of the British empire. The poetry of this period was issued in five volumes, dated respectively 1911-12, 1913-15, 1916-17, 1918-19, and 1920-22. edited by Sir Edward March who died in 1953. The poets who figured prominently in these volumes were Lescelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Rupert Brooke, G K. Chesterton, W. H. Davies, Walter De La Mare, John Drinkwater, James Elroy Flecker,' W. W. Gibson, D. H. Lawrence, John Masefield, Harold Monro, T. S. Moore, Ronald Ross, W. J. Turner, J. C. Squire, Siegfried Sassoon, J. Rosenberg, Robert Nicholas, Robert Graves, John Freeman. Maurice Baring, Edward Shanks, Edmund Blunden and Martin Armstrong.

"In reading this list of representative poets, we must conclude that if the quantity of poets engaged is in any way equalled by their quality this period must indeed have been one of great poetic strength and beauty."—(Scott-James).

The main positive aim of the Georgian poets was to treat natural things in a clear, natural and beautiful way, "neither too modern, nor too like Tennyson." In their treatment of nature and social life they discarded the use of archaic diction, such as, 'thee' and 'thou', and eschewed such poetical constructions as "winter drear" and "host on armed host". They dropped all gorgeous and grandiloquent expressions. In reaction to Victorianism their verse avoided all subjects that smacked of 'sadness, wickedness and cafe table." They were neither imperialistic nor pantheistic but "as simple as child's reading book." Their subjects were to be, "nature, love, leisure, old age, childhood, animals, sleep, unemotional subjects." These poets wrote extremely neat and melodious poems about sheep, bulls, and other domestic or wild animals. They also celebrated in pleasing verse the charm of various localities in the British Isles. Quietly they longed for the good old days and ways.

Commenting on the general nature and contribution of Georgian poetry, E. Albert very nicely remarks, "These poets had, of course, their clearly recognizable individual qualities, but were alike in their rejection of the ideas of the decadents, their quest for simplicity and reality, their love of natural beauty, especially as found in the English landscape, and their adherence to the forms and techniques of main traditions of English poetry. In their own way they too were escapists for the most part, their work shows little awareness of the industrial world around them, and often it has an all too obvious facility of technique and shallowness of feeling."

But soon there was a reaction against the Georgian poets because "they were merely writing nice poetry for nice people and that they were too inclined to indulge in mutual praise."

The Imagists

In the years immediately preceding the First World War, there were a few poets who started a reaction against Georgian poetry, which they criticized as facile and loose-appealing to the general public fighting shy of modernism. These reactionaries called themselves Imagists, and they kept before them the object of representing real life in images that were clear, precise and exact. The leader of this school, T. E. Hulme (1883-1917), insisted that "poetry should restrict itself to the world perceived by the senses, and to the presentation of its themes in a succession of concise, clearly visualized, concrete images accurate in detail and precise in significance." The Imagists aimed "at hard, clear, brilliant effects instead of the soft, dreamy vagueness or the hollow Miltonic rhetoric of the English Nineteenth Century tradition." They aimed at the clarity and concentration of the classic Chinese lyric and the Greek epigram. The Imagists defined poetry "as the presentation of a visual situation in the fewest possible concrete words, lightened of the burdens of conventional adjectival padding, and unhampered by general ideas or philosophical or moral speculations.

For the expression of their thoughts they evoked new rhythms and laid particular emphasis on *verse libre.* The Imagists wanted to create a very precise and concentrated expression of a new sort of consciousness for which the traditional techniques were inadequate, and naturally he made experiments in *verse libre* which provided them unlimited freedom of free expression. The new rhythms of the Imagists bore a close affinity to those of everyday speech and were far away from conventional verse patterns.

Hulme's leadership was followed in America and H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Ezra Pound adopted the new technique which Pound characterized as Imagism. The Imagists brought out a magazine, "The Egoist", and later on published three volumes of Imagist poetry, and published an anthology of Imagist poetry called *Des Imagistes* in 1914. The main contributors were F. S. Flint, Richard Aldington, F. M. Hulffer, Amy Lowell and D. H. Lawrence.

Imagism could not cut much ice. "The limitation of Imagism was that it concentrated too exclusively on a new technique, holding that the sudject was relatively unimportant."—(Collins). "The pursuit of the sequence of a very concise image and the use of *verse libre* often led to obscurity and licence. and the movement was strongly criticized and quickly died out. Yet Hulme's conception of the clearly visualized, concrete image is one of the most distinctive underlying ideas of later poetry, and its effect is seen particularly clearly in the work of T. S. Eliot and the poets of the 'thirties."—(E. Albert). "Imagism did modern poetry a tremendous service by pointing the way to a renovation of the vocabulary of poetry and to the necessity of ridding poetic technique of vague and empty verbiage, and dishonest and windy generalities."—Moody-Lovett).

The following poem, *Garden* by H. D. will give to the reader an idea of Imagist poetry :

"O wind, rend open the heart,
Cut apart the heat,
Rend it to tatters.
Fruit cannot drop,
Through this thick air.
Cut the heat,
Plough through it,
Turning it on either side of your path."

The Poetry of the Great War (1914-1918)

The Great World War of 1914-1918 exercised a considerable influence on English poetry of the Georgian Period. The poetry produced by the War was not all of a single note. While we hear laudatory verses coming out from elder poets, who stayed at home, we are shocked by the note of cynicism, satire and realism struck by poets who had actually been to the war-field and had witnessed the horrors of warfare.

Those who wrote gloriously for war and patriotism, of sacrifice and victory, were the elder poets : Kipling, Freeman, Hardy, Lawrence and Bunyan. William Butler Yeats, however, remained unaffected by this War. These poets sang of the nobility of self-sacrifice and the sublimity of patriotism. They regarded war as a call to duty and a time of trial for the nation

Hardy and Alice Meynell, Bridges and John Masefield were also moved to write about the War to a lesser extent. But it was the young soldier-poet Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) who gave expression to the fervent hopes of the people for the war in his sonnets, particularly the *Soldier*, which has been considered as a masterpiece of patriotic poetry.

When the War came in 1914, Brooke hailed it with enthusiasm :

> "Now, God be thanked who has matched us with this hour,
> And caught our youth and wakened us from sleeping,
> With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
> To turn, and swimmers into cleanness leaping
> Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary."

Rupert Brooke was killed in action on St. George's Day, 1915, and in popular imagination he was canonized. Another great soldier-poet was Siegfried Sassoon. Robert Graves, Robert Nicholas and Wilfred Owen, Julian Grenfell and Edmund Blunden also wrote poetry on the War during the years of the First World War.

Poetry of the 1920's

English poetry between 1920 and 1930 presents a fine spectacle of old traditional poets moving steadily by the side of the younger generation of the poets. Tradition and experiment go hand in hand during this period. From the points of view of both variety and number, the output of these poets is quite heavy—Hardy, Bridges, Davies, De La Mare, Housman, Gibson, Masefield and Bottomley. Though Georgian poetry ceased to appear after 1922, many of its poets, such as, Drinkwater, Shanks, W. J. Turner and their leader, J. C. Squire were still holding the stage. Alfred Noyes was adding to his songs and ballads the epical history of science in *The Torch Bearers*.

The new poets who had not yet opened their accounts in the field of literature were gradually gaining prominence, and among the new adventures in the realm of poetry were T S Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, Richard Church, Herbert Palmer, and Victoria Sackville-West. Humbert Wolfe and Roy Campbell were other prominent figures among the young generation of new poets. And then at the end of the decade there appeared the new constellation of Auden, Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and MacNeice.

The two great poets of this decade are undoubtedly T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell, and these two poets revolutionized the whole concept of poetry by their startling innovations in matter and new experiments in metre, diction and rhyme. They deserve special study. Eliot was deliberately opposed to the romantic movement of the nineteenth century, both for the decorative diffuseness of its style and its extreme subjectivity and glorification of the human ego. He emphasizes impersonality, tradition and painful labour of correctness and precision. In his opinion poetry is not a letting loose of emotion but an escape from emotion, not an expression of personality but an escape from personality This he calls objective correlative.

Poetry during the 1930's

The poetry of England between 1930 and 1940 was dominated by a set of poets—Auden, Spender, Cecil Day, Lewis and Louis MacNeice who made poetry a matter of revolutionary and dynamic thinking rather than allowing it dalliance with pastoral beauties. Poetry until recently had been interested in pastoral life and traditional heroic age, but "the material utilized by the characteristic poets of the nineteen-thirties differs as much from the familiar material of the pastoral ages as duralumin differs from gold.—(A. C. Ward). The poets of this period were intensely interested in modern life, and were bent upon harnessing all phases of modern life and knowledge in their works. They were interested in politics and were communistic in their outlook. Unmindful of their future in the realm of poetry, they went on preaching revolutionary communistic views for the regeneration of the decadent society of their times. "They were all acutely aware of the deficiencies of the order that has created the world in which they must live or die ; they abominate bourgeois society, with its repressions, creative comforts, and materialism, they felt that nothing short of a revolution will bring about a new order, basically communistic, in which living will be decent and self-respecting."—(Moody-Lovett).

The poets of this school were considerably influenced in their technique by Imagist poets, Symbolists of France, and the innovations of Hopkins and T. S. Eliot. They used slang, jazzy metres and imagery derived from machinery and boys' stories, but their technique of expression was the symbolist idiom learnt from Eliot, which was quite incomprehensible to the lowbrow. Their poetry often gives the impression of being written in a sort of private family language and of being addressed rather self-consciously and exclusively to be initiated. They have made poetry more intellectual than emotional.

But W. B. Yeats, like T. S. Eliot, is a school in himself, he is a mini-assimilation of many a trend of modern poetry. He stands as a bridge between the Pre-Raphaelites and the Decadents on the one hand, and between the Decadents and the Moderns on the other. He begins to write right from the eighteen-nineties and goes on to write till the beginning of the Second World War (1939). Yeats's output and literary period, his contribution and his experiments are of great literary significance.

General Features of the Modernist Poetry

The top-root of the new poetry which sprang up after the First World War was the revolt against Humanism and Romanticism. Hulme supplied its philosophy. It drew sustenance from several other sources. First, and chiefly, from the new science of psycho-analysis, which at the time of war attained a wonderful vogue from the success with which it had been applied to the treatment of neuroses. Next to what psycho-analysis sought to do for the mind of the individual, the Golden Bough provided a quarry in which Eliot, Yeats and others dug assiduously.

Other more purely literary influences were at work, the most important perhaps being that of the French Symbolists, whom Gosse and Symons had introduced to British readers many years before. The Symbolists, like the Imagists, sought to purge poetry of all foreign matter, narrative or reflective, leaving a residuum of 'pure poetry'. But whereas the Imagist, aiming at clear precise images, appealed almost exclusively to the eye, the aim of the Symbolists was to approximate poetry to music, in particular to the music of Wagner, using words as the musician uses notes, not to convey logical meaning but by their associations and patterned sounds to induce or evoke in the reader a state of mind which can be likened to the mystic trance.

The Symbolists were French, the Imagists mostly American; but the Modernists were also considerably influenced by certain English poets, notably Hopkins, Owen and Donne. Interest in Donne had been stimulated by the publication of the Clarendon Press edition of his poems in 1912. People who were tired of Georgian smoothness and simplicity were attracted to Donne even by his harshness, which they probably exaggerated still more by his intellectual energy, wit and daring similitudes.

The Modernists were in revolt not only against the spirit of Romantic poetry but also against its forms. Yeats, before Bridges, had declared that in English poetry rhymed verse and Miltonic blank verse were exhausted, himself experimented, not very successfully, in quantitative measures; other poets, notably Walter De La Mare, found out many inventions in the way of new stanzas and cadences.

The Modernist poetry is suggestive, allusive, comprehensive, compressed. direct and disciplined. Generally, it is esoteric and obscure. Decay and transience are its main themes. Shaped by psychology, science, anthropology, magic, symbolism and metaphysics, it tries to measure life with coffee-spoons. It has also been called "eccentric, wayward, puerile and common-place " Pinto regards this period as that of "the Crisis in English Poetry" which began about thirty years before the outbreak of the First World War, and is a part of the moral, intellectual, social and economic crisis of England and Western Europe. "This crisis makes the end of the great period of human history which began with the Renaissance," and of which some of the chief aspects can be summed up in the words of humanism, individualism, capitalism and liberalism. A. C. Ward observes, "The poetry of the period shows a distinct decline, not in general level of execution but in genius and breadth of range. The great emotions, especially the emotion of romantic love, are avoided by most poets."

They see the world as children see it, and are content with the mere external appearance of things. They seldom seek to interpret; they aim merely at communicating in the most simple language possible, their delight in sheer physical beauty or their discovery that much that is conventionally regarded as commonplace or ugly has a real beauty of its own. The poets, apparently, have no theory of the universe to offer us, no great ideal to set before us. In the face of modern industrialism, they solace their souls by retiring in the country, and celebrating the beauties of unspoiled Nature. "Those who attempt to work on a larger scale generally fail to sustain a high level of imagination and expression—their verse tends to become rhetoric." The soul of every Modernist poet, whatever his programme, is full of self-disgust and self-doubt.

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3. W. B. YEATS'S LIFE-SKETCH

[1865—1939]

Birth and Parentage

William Butler Yeats, born at Sandymouth near Dublin on June 13, 1865, was the eldest son of John Butler Yeats. W. B. Yeats's grandfather Reverend Butler Yeats was the Rector of the Church of Ireland. The Rector loved sports and dancing and was inclined to evangelicalism. The family perhaps migrated from Yorkshire (England) to Ireland in the seventeenth century.

William Butler Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats was educated at Crosby where he developed faith in God and His handiwork. Later on John Yeats studied in a school kept by a Scotsman famous for flogging and harsh discipline. When he left school, his faith in God and morality was dwindled. Later at Trinity College, he shone as an undergraduate and studied Butler's *Analogy*, the Bible of his father, and his orthodox views further weakened. "His scepticism was accentuated by John Stuart Mill's 'Works' which stressed faith on reason and logic."

John Butler Yeats became a barrister in 1866 and left the profession in 1867 because of his interests in painting. He left home to study painting in London. He found painting more congenial to his temperament. In London, he joined Heatherley's Art School where Leighton and Millais used to deliver their lectures. This school preached and practised Pre-Raphaelitism. So John, too, was influenced by Rossetti, and copied Walt's technique, and also admired passion in pictures. In his own painting, too, he admitted passion. Afterwards John Butler Yeats lost faith in allegorical pictures and narrative portraits of the age and was sceptical about Pre-Raphaelitism.

Thus, William Butler Yeats's father was a great intellectual and a man of varied interests but of strong opinions. He was opposed to orthodox dogmas and did not cherish worldly ambitions. He was educated for Church, but while still an undergraduate, he lost faith in Christianity. He could have been a successful lawyer had he continued in his legal profession, but his heart lay elsewhere in the higher values of life and in the practice of fine arts.

Yeats's mother was different from his father. She was a country-girl, named Susan. She came of the well-to-do family of the Pollexfens who lived at Sligo in the west of Ireland. Susan Pollexfen was in many ways different from her artist husband. She loved the countryside and had faith in country-lore, in ghosts and fairies. She talked less and was singularly free from a sense of self-praise.

Childhood

William Butler Yeats had toured London, Dublin and Sligo even in his childhood with his parents. His father had to shift his household several times between Dublin and London, and the children were often left with their maternal grand-parents at Sligo for economic reasons. So it was in Sligo, his mother's parental home, that Yeats spent most of his early childhood, while his father was adventuring about. "A number of factors combined to embitter the early years of the poet. His chief difficulty was with his features—a dark complexion and lanky body made him self-conscious. The neighbouring children would look on him askance and wonder if he came from India."—(B. P. Misra). Yeats's eyesight was bad; he was physically weak and unsportsmanlike. His mother's people, on the other hand, were strong and hefty men and had little use for this weakling. They left him studiously aloof; and left to himself, the child developed a liking for solitude and a bias for reverie. He began to develop a love for the mountain-caves where he would pass his time in daydreams. Later he was to confess that he used to follow the aimless peregrinations of two country dogs. His education was almost completely neglected and he was also slow to learn. Speaking about his childhood miseries, Yeats himself wrote in his autobiography : "I may have already had the night of misery when, having prayed for several days that I might die, I began to be afraid that I was dying and prayed that I might live."—(*Autobiography*, p. 23).

Yeats's uncles and aunts regarded him as a mentally deficient child. He was dull and slow to learn, and bad at spelling. Once his father was staying at Merville, and Yeats was surprised to find that he did not go to church. His father's attitude encouraged him to refuse to go to church on Sunday mornings. Nonetheless, Keats believed in God. He has written in his *Autobiographies* : "I was often devout, my eyes filling with tears at the thought of God and my own sins, but I hated church."

Yeats's early education was by and large neglected. As a dull and weak student he was sent, in 1875, to the Godolphin School at Hammersmith. He was sent to London only a year ago. Memories of Sligo alwys accompanied him ; he yearned for the life of Sligo ; he hated London. Sligo was a land full of beautiful natural scenery. London was much different from it. "A poignant memory came upon me the other day while I was passing the drinking-fountain near Hall and Park, for there I and my sister had spoken together of our longing for Sligo and our hatred for London. I knew we were both very close to tears and remembered with wonder,—that I longed for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hands," so wrote William Butler Yeats in his *Autobiographies.*

Schooling

It was at the age of ten, in 1875, that Yeats was sent formally to a school named Godolphin School at Hammersmith. His father taught him and read from the novels of Fenimore Cooper. He remained in that school between 1875 and 1880. There he attained some proficiency in Latin and History, but was weak in Mathematics. It was here again that he was ridiculed as a queer sort of boy, a black boy, an Indian. He began to avoid the company of the fellow boys, and did not participate in school activities. He made friendship with a healthy robust boy, Cyril Vesey, who used to defend him. But though physically weak, he impressed upon that athlete that intellectually he was far superior to him.

Willie's (as William Butler Yeats was then known) father continued his interest in painting. At this time, he (John) was showing interest not in the Pre-Raphaelites but in the French art. Willie was moved by the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, *Ivanhoe* and the *Lays of the Last Minstrel*, which were read to him by his father. He also studied *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, and all of Hans Handerson except the *Ugly Duckling*. Willie liked Irving playing Hamlet. His father also read to him some of the tales of Chaucer. Willie read by himself Balzac's *La Comedie Humaine.*

The family of Yeats left Bedford Park and settled at Howth County, Dublin, in 1880. In this year, his father sent him to Erasmus Smith School, Dublin. Here the youngster developed a pose—that of a London-travelled sophisticated person, with advanced beliefs and a curiously rhythmical manner of speaking—among the homebred class-fellows. These days he read Macaulay and Scott, Shelley and Shakespeare. He was now a grown-up teenager, and having few open air interests, began taking interest in sex and erotic thoughts. At this time he also took to writing verses. Occasionally, he would dramatize himself as a sage, sleep in caves and, like the younger Shelley, be on the lookout for ghosts. His poems took mostly the shape of soliloquies and he began to formulate aesthetic theories of his own. The father's scepticism had made the son also a sceptic, and he created a sensation at school by criticizing Christianity and declaring himself a follower of Darwin and Huxley. But his interest in science proved to be short-lived. He studied at Erasmus Smith High School in Dublin from 1881 to 1883.

Higher Education

When his parents wanted him to join the Trinity College, Dublin, fear of failing in the entrance examination tormented him, and he refused to do so. His classics and mathematics were very weak ; so his father sent him to the Metropolitan School of Art to become a painter. Later on he was sent to the more distinguished art school run by the Royal Hibernian Academy. It was here that he came in contact with the well-known philosopher and critic, George Russell. Russell became his friend and sharer in his interest in magic and the supernatural. Yeats also became friendly with Professor Dowden (a poet), Katharine Tynan, Dr. Hyde, John F. Taylor and others who played a significant role in his later life. As a painter, however, Yeats was just as bad as a scholar, and his manner of painting was the traditional Pre-Raphaelite technique of his father.

His stay at the Royal Academy proved to be a boon in his literary pursuits. George Russell, known to literature as 'A. E.,' strengthened Yeats in his leanings towards the occult. With his encouragement and co-operation, he began writing poetic plays like *Vivien and Time, Love and Death, Mosada,* and *The Island of Statues.* In each of these plays escapism is a dominant common note.

Yeats's Various Interests

Now was one of the most churning and shaping periods of Yeats's life. Erotic passion, craze for sexual satisfaction began to haunt him very badly. The awakening of sex came upon him "like the bursting of a shell." He experienced a hopeless passion for a red-haired cousin, Laura Johnson, who was already engaged to another person. It was also during this time that he visited the island of Innisfree opposite Sligo, which figures in his famous lyric, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*.

His interest in painting languished gradually. He began to write poetry in imitation of Shelley and Spenser. His father exalted dramatic poetry, and so Yeats wrote play after play with fantastic and incoherent plots. In fact, he began to concentrate on a threefold programme, which included interest in a form of literature, interest in nationality and a passionate interest in a form of philosophy. He knew that the Irish had still to get recognition as men of letters and literature. His search for form in literature was to take him to all manners of experiments over a long lifetime till he acquired the confident personal tone of his last poems.

Yeats's Philosophical Interests

Even when William Butler Yeats was at the Art School he plunged himself into the whirlpools of philosophy. His contact with

George Russell in the Art School had given strength to him in his belief in ghosts and fairies. In the Dublin of his days, the Theosophical movement was making its impact and appeal felt popularly. Madame Blavatsky established the Theosophical Society. She spoke of the hidden wisdom of which she was the possessor by virtue of her becoming a theosophist. Yeats wanted to investigate this hidden wisdom. So he decided to join the Theosophical Society. In 1888, he joined its esoteric section in order to initiate himself to all of its mysteries. Moreover, in the first meeting of the Hermetic Society, Yeats was deeply impressed by the Bengali Brahmin, Mohini Chatterjee, a member of the Theosophical Society who had the profound knowledge of the Indian and the Western philosophy. William Butler Yeats composed verses expressing Mohini's ideas in verse 'The Indian upon God,' 'The Indian to His Love,' 'The Sad Shepherd,' etc. are quite well-known in this respect.

As stated in the preceding lines the Russian lady, Madame Blavatsky, started Theosophy which was a blend of science, religion and philosophy. It revealed the shortcomings of Christianity as well as of science. About Madame Blavatsky's deep impact, Yeats himself writes in his *Autobiographies* :

> "Presently having heard that Madame Blavatsky had arrived from France, or from India, I thought it time to look the matter up. Certainly, if wisdom existed anywhere in the world, it must be in some lonely mind admitting no duty to us, communing with God only, conceding nothing from fear or favour......I found Madame Blavatsky in a little house at Norwood, with but, as she said, three followers left......the Society of Psychical Research had just reported on her Indian phenomena......and as one of the three followers sat in an outer-room to keep undesirable visitors, I was kept a long time kicking my heels."

Yeats's Interest in Magic

Having joined the esoteric section of the Theosophical Society, for a time all seemed excellent to Yeats But his curiosity was too much for the discipline imposed on its members, and Yeats had to be asked to resign Secondly, Yeats's faith in Madame Blavatsky's marvels was also shaken after Richard Hodgson, who was sent to India to verify the truth of the marvels referred to in the *Occult World* by Sinnet, declared that Madame Blavatsky was a charlatan. Nonetheless, Yeats resigned in 1890 from the membership of the Theosophical Society, but hastened to join other mystic orders which promised its devotees supernatural powers. His choice now was on the Order of the Golden Dawn, which recommended the practice of magic rites as the method of spiritual discovery. His belief in magic was strengthened by Mac Gregor Mathers, formerly known as Liddell Mathers. In his *Autobiographies*, Yeats mentions about his faith in magic : "He was the author of *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, and his studies were only two—magic and the theory of war, for he believed himself a born commander and equal in wisdom and in power to that old Jew. He had copied many manuscripts on magic, ceremonial and doctrine, in the British Museum, and was to copy more in continental libraries, and it was through him mainly that I began certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory. Mathers had formed a Society of 'The Hermetic Students' and in May or June 1887, I was initiated into that society in a Charlotte Street Studio, and being in at a most receptive age, shaped and isolated."

"Mathers evoked interest in certain symbols and used cardboards to arouse them. His Golden Dawn had an hierarchical system based on Rosicrucianism. Yeats's predilection for occultism became intensified and deepened through his knowledge and explorations of the magic, spiritualism and the supernatural world which he has enshrined in his poems and plays." Under the influence of the Order of the Golden Dawn of Mathers, Yeats became almost a magician, and his processes of thought and feeling strongly savoured of its strange ritual right upto the first decade of the twentieth century. His talk of the 'rose' in prose and poetry was the artistic fruition of this influence.

Yeats's Involvement in Irish Nationalism

Ireland in the nineteen-eighteens was burning with a passion for patriotism and nationalism. The Home Rule Movement was heading towards a crisis, and so was Parnell's brilliant political leadership. The other luminary shining brilliantly on the political scene of Ireland was O'Leary who was back from five years' imprisonment in England. He was proving to be a great moral force in the politics of Ireland. In 1887, Yeats's family returned to London and set up a house in Bedford Park, London. Yeats had been having patriotic and nationlistic feeling since childhood. So, he naturally felt attracted towards O'Leary and became one of his strong disciples. O'Leary was of the opinion that, besides politics, literature held an important place in the regeneration of a nation. So he used to promote nationalist literature too. Among the studious disciples of O'Leary were Douglas Hyde, Katharine Tynan, the poetess. Contact with these people and Nationalistic Movement gave Yeats a new confidence in the value of folk-element in literature.

Prof. Dowden of Trinity College was against folk-literature ; he used to tell his pupils that the Irish folk-literature would not attract many readers because the readers will not be familiar with the Irish legends and folklore. But O'Leary upheld different views. He was of the opinion that if the literature on Irish folklore was of a high order, people will themselves like to know the material in order to enjoy that. Here was an opportunity for Yeats to put into practice what he had heard from his mother. With this aim in view was formed a Society called the 'Young Ireland Society'. This was joined by the London Irish writers. Many young Irish Societies accepted its leadership. He composed Irish Ballads for O'Leary's newspaper "The Gael". *The Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* was published in 1888. The old Irish heroes were reincarnated and portrayed. Yeats records in his *Autobiographies* : "In his unfinished *History of Ireland*, he had made the old Irish heroes, Finn and Oisin and Cuchulain, alive again, taking them, for I think he knew no Gaelic, from the dry pages of O'Gurry and his school." Under the direct influence of O'Leary and Irish National Movement, Yeats wrote *The Wanderings of Oisin*. Another work, a play named *The Countess Cathleen* also portrayed Irish themes and characters. Through O'Leary he became acquainted with the works of such nationalist poets as Davis, Mangan and Callanan.

Yeats and Maud Gonne

It was John O'Leary who introduced Maud Gonne in 1888. At that time Yeats was twenty-three and was taking keen interest in the Irish Nationalistic movements. Maud Gonne was a country-girl of an aristocratic family. She combined beauty with nationalistic fervour. She was an extremist. Yeats loved her passionately. This passion changed the course of his life. It affected not only his life but also poetry ; it was a kind of phoenix experience for Yeats, through her fiery and energetic personality, Yeats was to plunge into action.

Maud Gonne could not win Yeats towards her political ambitions. She wanted to be an Irish Joan, and found that Yeats was not the right person who could make her life happy. In February 1903, Yeats received a letter from Paris ; in this letter Maud Gonne informed him that she had married Major John MacBride To the cultivated, poetic, and idealistic Yeats, it came as a severe shock. The one woman who was his all in all had ended by marrying a 'lout'. His heart was broken ; his health gave reason for anxiety ; in the field of art his collaboration with George Moore ended in a fiasco ; and for some years it was feared that he had become a victim to consumption. The tall, beautiful, majestic, queen-like Maud Gonne was the queen of his heart. It was to attract Maud Gonne that he had become a fiery revolutionary, and was deeply engaged during 1897 and 1898 in a political movement. He even joined the secret extremist revolutionary Irish Republican Brotherhood for a time, all to impress Maud. She shared his growing interest in the occult but refused to marry him

It had appeared for some time as if Maud, the Helen of Yeats's heart, was feeling attracted enchantingly in the fold of the poet, but things turned off differently. Yeats and Maud Gonne fell out in 1893. She went away to France in a frenzied fit. Yeats retired to Sligo to suffer a short span of consumption, both physical and mental. Later on he came back to London. At this difficult hour of his life, Lady Gregory gave him maternal care, and in order to help him to forget his heart-break, sent him out on an American tour. This was the poet's first visit to America, and wrought a sea-change in his life. On his return, he was a changed person.

The lovers of poetry should rather thank Maud Gonne for not marrying Yeats. It was she, indeed, who made him a true poet, who filled his life with inspiration essential for a great creation. Once Yeats asked Maud Gonne :

"Oh, Maud, why don't you marry me and give up this tragic struggle (political engagement) and live a peaceful life ? I could make such a beautiful life for you among artists and writers who would understand you."

And Maud Gonne replied :

> "Willie are you not tired of asking that question ? How often have I told you to thank the gods that I will not marry you. You would not be happy with me."
>
> "I am not happy without you," said Yeats.
>
> "Oh yes, you are, because you make beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and you are happy in that. Marriage would be such a dull affair. Poets should never marry. The world should thank me for not marrying you. I will tell you one thing, our friendship has meant a great deal to me, it has helped me often when I needed help, needed it perhaps more than you or anybody know, for I never talk or even think of these things......" replied Maud Gonne.

After three years of her marriage, Maud Gonne sought separation from Mac Bride, and began to live separately. Yeats still loved her. He hurried there and placed his love at her feet. She was unyielding.

Even in 1916, Yeats's love for her was as fresh as in 1889. There is a story that Yeats having failed in his love-affair with Maud Gonne, turned his amorous attentions from the mother to the daughter, for Maud Gonne's daughter by Mac Bride was as tempting in her beauty as the mother had been. Yeats was now forty-one ; Isuelt MacBride, briefly in her teens, after enjoying the fun provided by an old man's love, refused to have anything to do with him. The poet came back from Paris, a sadder and perhaps a wiser man.

Politics and Disillusionment

The Rhymers' Club was founded in 1891, in London, and Yeats now came to know closely the members of the "Cheshire Cheese". The Rhymers' Club met at an old eating-house called the 'Cheshire Cheese', and hence it was also called by this name, particularly, Arthur Symons, Dawson and Lionel Johnson. The result was his keen interest in aestheticism and the French Symbolist Movement. These interests are reflected in the volume *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). In 1896, Yeats met Lady Gregory and the dramatist, J. M. Synge, who came to exercise a lasting influence on his life and poetry. In 1898, he became the President of the Woolf Tone Memorial Association and tried to unite the different political parties in Ireland. His experiences were not happy, in disgust the poet withdrew within himself, and this explains the introspective nature of *The Wind Among the Reeds.*

Yeats and the National Theatre

However, this phase of withdrawal from reality was only temporary. With the turn of the century, important developments took place in Yeats's life and poetry. The event which made the deepest impact on Yeats's outlook on life was Maud Gonne's marriage with John MacBride in 1903. He was disillusioned with Irish politics and politicians as a result of his unsavoury experiences in the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Under Lady Gregory's influence he had been working over the project of an Irish National Theatre. In 1902, an Irish National Dramatic Society was formed with Yeats as its president. When the Abbey Theatre was established in 1904, Yeats became its producer-manager. In this capacity he displayed great organizing capacity. He worked as such till 1910. He was involved in endless public controversies—the Abbey Theatre Controversy, the Controversy over Synge's play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, and the Hugh Lane Controversy—which shattered his illusions about Ireland and Irish people. These frustrations, personal, political and social, go a long way to explain the bitter, sardonic tone of the poetry of his middle period. The influence of Ezra Pound, whom he met around 1913, and the study of Donne's poetry, were the other important factors which pulled him out of this dream-world into the world of men. All this change began with *In the Seven Woods* (1913), and is fully seen in *The Responsibilities* (1914).

Yeats's Affairs with Diana Vernon and Florence Farr

Though Yeats was keeping himself busy to forget Maud Gonne, but he could not do so. He had loved her too deeply to forget. In order to forget his sorrow, he once again sought relief in the arms of Diana Vernon. He had developed sexual relations with her. She tried to divorce her husband. Later on, Diana and Yeats retired to a private cottage and had the sexual bliss. Although he returned to Diana, and there was a passionate interlude also with Florence Farr, the obsession with Maud Gonne was lasting.

The lady whom he called in his manuscript notes, Diana Vernon, was a beautiful, sensitive and very unhappily married novelist. She was charming and of a good family, and her love was flattering and consolatory. She gave him to understand that she had many lovers. Nonetheless, he went into an affair with her. They were about to elope, but somehow cancelled the plan. Later on, they stayed together in a room in a hotel for long, and enjoyed the bliss of each other's arms This affair continued for about ten months when Yeats received a letter from Maud Gonne. The letter disturbed him a lot. Sensing something was wrong, Diana left Yeats and no more returned to Yeats for many years.

Yeats's Marriage with Georgie Hyde-Lees

Decades of waiting and amorous affairs led him nowhere. He could not resolve his internal conflict. He thought it was not wise to remain a bachelor. He decided to go in for marriage. Among Ezra Pound's friends was one Georgie Hyde-Lees. Yeats had known her as a medium for something. Like him, she was a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn. On October 1917, Yeats married her, and the marriage-bed solved his antinomies. "Serenity, as never before, came over the poet, who wept over barren passion no more. By 1919, he had become a father and felt, as he wrote to Rabindranath Tagore, 'more knitted into life'."

It was from this time on, that Yeats's stature as a poet grew. Using his wife as a mediun, Yeats drew out a whole scheme of life and published it privately as *Vision* (1917) This was his rehash of philosophy, theology and astrology. But things were not quite happy for Yeats, "the man." With a young wife, he was angry at being old ; in a Catholic republic he was unhappy at swamping of old aristocratic values before a power-drunk demos. His sense of the defect of old values and his sense of sexual inadequacy set up a new ferment in him. Out of this quarrel with himself, he made the best poetry.

After Marriage

Yeats was growing old but his wife was still young. He wanted to be a young man once again. For this purpose, he underwent an operation—Voronoff Operation in 1934. for a time his youth revived but the revived zest was temporary. He went to Majorca, in search of peace where he met Purohit Swami. With him he pondered over the *Upanishads*. He helped the Swami to translate the *Upanishads* and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*. His wish was to plunge himself into impersonal poetry. He wanted to write a sort of European *Geeta*. His last poem *The Black Tower* expressed the central theme of the *Gita*. He thought that duty must be done, though there may be none to reward it. This was the thought of his last poem. He had written the European *Geeta* and had done his duty. The crisis came on January 28, 1939, at Cape Marten in the south of France. In other words, we may say that he sailed to his Byzantium. He was buried temporarily in the cemetery of Roquerbrune. After the Second World War, his body was brought to Drumcliffe as he himself wished in his epitaph :

> Under bare Ben Bulben's head
> In Drumcliffe Churchyard Yeats is laid,
> An ancestor was rector there
> Long years ago, a church stands near,
> By the road an ancient cross
> No marble, no conventional phrase
> On limestone quarried near the spot
> By his command these words are cut :
> "*Cast a cold eye*
> On life, on death
> Horseman pass by !"

4. YEATS'S IRISH BACKGROUND

Yeats was born in Ireland, made its past and present the subject-matter of his poetry, and was imbued in Irish traditions. But he was both of England and Ireland, as his poetry is rooted both in the English and the Irish traditions. He wrote in the English language, and was influenced by a number of English poets like Shelley, Spencer Swinburne, Rossetti and Morris. By his birth and temperament, by accident and upbringing, however, he was the poet of Ireland, rather the National Poet of Ireland. In order to understand his poetry, it is necessary to know something of his Irish background.

Ireland is different from England, not only in her economy, religion, tradition and ways of thought, but there is something different in the very essence of the country, in the very earth and the sky. Every hill and dale, every river, every tree in Ireland is the haunt of some spirit or some ghost. Every inch of ground, every ruined tower or building is rich in local associations. "The living migrate but the dead stay on." It is a land haunted by shadows, spirits and memories, a land on which civilization has made but little impression. It was this spirit-world which enabled Yeats to burst on Europe with a new imagery, a new mythology, and new legends. His heroes, kings and fairy people, are of the very soil of Ireland.

Ireland is mainly a peasant country. It is not even a land of villages like India, but a land of cottages standing in isolation by themselves. There are dim, dark forests and lush vegetation and landscapes with few traces of human habitation. It is a land of twilight, of dim uncertain lights. It is the least industrialized country in western Europe, and does not have much of a middle-class. We have in Yeats's poetry pictures of sea-trading merchants inspired by his grandfather, George Pollexfen, but the factory owner and the big industrialists are not even mentioned once. It is as if they did not exist The Irish peasants and the big landlords are the people who constantly appear in Yeats's poetry. The big country families were fast vanishing when Yeats took to writing. Of the big houses he writes much and has a nostalgic yearning for them. "The aristocratic basis is seen even in his early poetry in the cold, proud women, his portrayal of love as a grand, distant passion, in the subject-matter, so frequently kings, heroes and their contentions."—(V. K. N. Menon). He stands outside the industrial turmoil and this gives to his poetry a peculiar pastoral serenity.

But Ireland is not merely a peasant country, it is also famous for its love of Catholic creed. While most of the leading families in the days of Yeats were Protestants, the people, the masses were, and still are, mainly Catholics. The typical Irish landlord of Yeats's day had an inherited contempt for Catholicism, half social and half religious in origin. He was, in general, loyal to the British government, though it was from this very Protestant aristocracy that most of the leaders of the Irish revolution were drawn He was self-conscious, proud of his old family, and so kept a little apart from the common Catholic people. Yeats himself came of a Protestant family, and this might account for his temperamental aloofness. The education was unscientific, the Catholic masses believed in angels, devils and ghosts, their Protestant landlords in their hatred for such superstitions, and idolatry broke away completely from the common culture. Thus, the Irish scene was a divided one and this duality might explain the conflict of opposites in the personality of Yeats. He was, so to say, "caught between two worlds".

Despite the advent of Christianity, faith in the old Irish gods persisted. Superstitious practices, witchcraft and magic, had a strong power over the imagination of the people. The Irish tradition has it that gods lived in Ireland before the Gauls came, that they fought for their possession of the country, and at last reached a sort of settlement with the invaders, and withdrew into the hills leaving the level plains to the Gauls. There they are still supposed to live. It was also supposed that before the gods, there were darker powers who possessed the land, and some of them still survive. In this way, the land teems with gods and spirits who are known, respected and feared. "Their deeds in different places are remembered ; history, trials sway into myth, and myth is projected forward into history."—(Stock). There are fairy hills into which no farmer will dare intrude. The people are afraid to give offence to these supernatural powers and try to placate them in all possible ways. Christianity still carries on its battle against this pagan faith of the masses, but with little success.

Politics in Yeats's day was a powerful force in the life of the people. England ruled the country, and the rulers were often unsympathetic and harsh. The war of independence was on, the spirit of nationalism was on the rise, and people's thoughts were full of it. Children were told stories of English savagery and believed them quite naturally. Irish leaders like O'Donnell, Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmett, were glorified and exalted very high. Their heroic deeds became a source of inspiration to the people. Many uprisings and revolutions against England took place. There was much bloodshed. People suffered a lot. The Black and Tans, the British mercenaries let loose a reign of terror and the memory of the people was "Dragon-ridden," and the smell of blood was everywhere. Everything took on a political colouring, and even poets like Yeats could not ignore it.

Yeats has frequently used all this background in his poems. During the second and the third phases of his poetry, he takes up the contemporary scene in his poetry, whereas in the first phase it is the legendary past of Ireland that becomes his treasury of inspiration, and for symbols and images. Irish Nationalism too, gets its right place in his poems and plays.

5. FORMATIVE FORCES

Parents

Yeats was of a complex and fertile mind. He had multifarious interests. A number of influences operated to mould his mental outlook from the very childhood. Family being the first formative force, Yeats could not remain unaffected by his parents and uncle and aunt. The poet's father, John Yeats, was an artist, author and philosopher, and his influence was at its height in Yeats's youth. It was he who inspired his love of poetry, and moulded his literary views and opinions. When Yeats showed for the first time his capacity to write poems, he jumped with joy and said, "Behold, I have given a tongue to the sea-cliffs."

Yeats's father loved Blake, so young Yeats came to love him too. The father was always anxious for evolving a distinctly poetical character, and he would emphasize the necessity of high vitality and vivid experience for an artist to equip himself with Such an attitude of the father influenced Yeats's attitude. Like his father, Yeats was also convinced about the poet's being virtually a solitary man, as intense personal feeling being the substance of poetry. John Yeats firmly believed that poetry is born from a fusion of fact and dream, concreteness and fantasy, and this interrelatedness of fact and dreams, of reality and imagination, constitute one of the basic elements of W. B. Yeats's poetry. The father's belief that a poet should be full of fire in respect of some emotion or impression, and to work out that fire in his poetry with cold logic, and resolute purpose also gets reflected in Yeats's work.

It was on his father's inspiration and persuasiveness that W. B. Yeats developed his interest in painting. His liking for the Pre-Raphaelites was also encouraged by his father's love for that school of painters Yeats's disenchantment with Christianity and the spirit of questioning the religious beliefs were also hereditary traits.

William Butler Yeats's mother, Susan, was a country-girl. She loved the countryside and had faith in folklore. Yeats's love for Irish mythology and his faith in ghosts and fairies may be a by-product of his mother's influence. Yeats's love for the countryside, especially for Sligo, too, should have been inherited from his mother.

The Influence of the Pollexfens

Yeats tells us in his *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* that the first figure which he remembered and which had a powerful impact on his imagination was that of his maternal grandfather, William Pollexfen. Mr. Pollexfen was a great seafaring man, and the sailors in Yeats's poetry and drama owe much to him. William Pollexfen was a passionate man, as Yeats says, "I often wonder, if the delight in passionate men in my poetry and plays is more than his memory." Even this lovely passionate man, his grandfather, appears again and again in Yeats's plays and poems. The poet's own "loneliness of spirit" must also have been derived from the same source.

Yeats's maternal grandmother came of a family of the Middletons who were a country-family having close relationship with the country people. It was with her that Yeats heard his first fairy story, and it was from her that he derived his interest in country-myths and legends. The servants there also talked to the child of the fairies, and Yeats, thus acquired a growing interest in supernatural.

Early Literary Influences

The senior Yeats had encouraged his son to read Blake, Shelley, Keats, Morris and Rossetti. Those days Yeats wrote poetry influenced by Spenser and Shelley. In fact, Yeats was mixing Shelley and Spenser with Wordsworthian simplicity. His father read out to him *The Lays of Ancient Rome*, *Ivanhoe*, and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and this gave him a wish to turn a magician. His father's agnosticism (indifference to religion) made Yeats a sceptic As a schoolboy, Yeats had shown some interest in contemporary science—the theories of Darwin and Huxley and Spencer—but the interest soon faded away, and he began to hate Victorian science with a 'monkish hatred'.

The Rhymers' Club

The Yeats moved to London in 1887. There the young poet compiled Irish folk-tales for London publishers, contributed poems to English periodicals, and in collaboration with Edward Ellis edited Blake's *Prophetic Books*. In 1888, with financial help from O'Leary he published his first book containing a narrative poem, *The Wanderings of Oisin*, and a number of shorter pieces. Three years later he was attending the meeting of the Rhymers' Club at the Cheshire Cheese with Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, and the other writers of the Tragic Generation. These are men whom he called :

> "Poets with whom I learned my trade,
> Companions of the Cheshire Cheese."

He acknowledged their debt handsomely later on in the poem called *The Grey Rock* :

> "You had to face your ends when young—
> 'Twas wine or women, or some curse—
> But never made poorer song
> That you might have a heavier purse,
> Nor gave land service to a cause
> That you might have a troop of friends.
> You kept the Muses' sterner laws,
> ... ...
> And therefore earned the right—and yet
> Dowson and Johnson most I praise—
> To troop with those of the world's forgot,
> And copy their proud steady gaze."

Yeats admired Dowson's lyrics, but was most influenced by Lionel Johnson who introduced him to the writings of Pater and gave him new ideals of scholarship and intellectual distinction.

The Pre-Raphaelites

Yeats tells us in his *Essays*, "I had learned to think in the midst of the last phase of Pre-Raphaelitism " He found it a good exercise to write in keeping with this convention during the first years of his apprenticeship. His early poetry was strongly influenced by Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites, but it had an other-worldliness which comes from Celtic legend and a peculiar kind of simplicity derived from the folk-culture of the Irish peasants. Dr. Bowra rightly calls him "a good pupil of William Morris, a poet of escape, singer of music in the deep heart's core. Yeats himself wrote :

> "We were the last romantics—chose for theme
> Traditional sanctity and loveliness . ..."

Influence of Occultism and Indian Thought

Yeats was influenced by Indian thought from the very beginning. The Theosophists and the magic of India attracted him in his youth. He also wrote an introduction to Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, translated by Tagore himself into English from Bengali. Yeats was moved to tears to read the poem and arranged for the staging of Tagore's *The Post Office* at the Abbey Theatre. Yeats welcomed the light and inspirations from the East. He also had his contacts with Sarojini Naidu and Toru Lata Datta. Yeats became interested in the philosophical disquisitions of Tagore's brother Dwijendra Nath Tagore Later he met Purohit Swami, another monk, with whose help he rendered the translation of the *Upanishads*. Indian philosophy, especially Vedant, influenced him a great deal. Esoteric Buddhism also influenced him.

Yeats studied literature which instilled in him a distrust of science. He loved psychological researches and mystical philosophy. He broke with his father who was follower of John Stuart Mill. With his friend he read, "Reichenbach on Odic Force and Mammals" published by the Theosophical Society. He subscribed to the faith that the spirits of wind and water had truth. He had read Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. He became a follower of the Theosophical Society and was drawn towards magical practices. Yeats writes, "Sometimes a Professor of Oriental Languages at Trinity College, a Persian, came to our society and talked of the magicians of the East. When he was a little boy, he had seen a vision in a pool of ink, a multitude of spirits singing in Arabic, 'Woe unto those that do not believe us'."

Yeats very much believed in ghosts. He writes of himself, having said in an evening party at O'Leary's, "Five out of every six people have seen a ghost."

The Theosophic Movement attracted Yeast's notice for certain things which were congenial to his temperament. The poet was acquiring a growing interest in esoteric practices Even when he was at the Art School, he plunged himself into the whirlpools of philosophy. His contact with George Russell in the Art School had given strength to him in his belief in ghosts and fairies. In the Dublin of his days, the Theosophical Movement was making its impact and appeal felt popularly. Madame Blavatsky established the Theosophical Society. In 1888, he joined its esoteric section in order to initiate himself to all of its mysteries. Moreover, in the first meeting of the Hermetic Society, Yeats was deeply impressed by the Bengali Brahmin, Mohini Chatterjee, a member of the Theosophical Society who had the profound knowledge of the Indian and the western philosophy. Yeats now came under the spell of Hindu Thought and Vedantic Philosophy. This interest is now reflected in his three early poems on Indian themes—"The Indian upon a God", "The Indian to His Love", "The Shepherd", etc , which are quite well-known in this respect. The Hindu philosophy of "one-ness of all", one spirit enveloping the universe, but objectifying itself into myriad forms, remained an integral part of his poetry even after he had shaken off Indian languor and scenery.

Yeats's love for magic was further intensified by Madame Blavatsky and MacGregor Mathers. "Golden Dawn" had an hierarchical system based on Rosicrucianism. Yeats's predilection for occultism became intensified and deepened through his knowledge and the explorations of the magic, spiritualism and the supernatural world which he has enshrined in his poems and plays.

The Women

Two women played an important part in the development of Yeats's genius One was Maud Gonne, the orphan daughter of an Anglo-Irish colonel, who had become a fierce political agitator. She failed to convert Yeats to her extremist views, but her beauty and her passionate idealism fascinated him throughout his life and were the inspiration of much of his poetry. The other was Lady Gregory, the middle-aged widow of a great land-owner in the west of Ireland, a woman of considerable literary ability with a great enthusiasm for arts and a wide knowledge of Irish legend and folklore. Yeats stayed with her often at her beautiful house at the Cool in Country. Galways peasants and this enabled him to review that fruitful contact with folk-culture which he had known in youth in Sligo. With Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn and George Moore, at the beginning of the century, he started the famous literary theatre in Dublin which was to be the focal point of a great Irish literary renaissance. Another woman who entered his life and influenced him was Olivia Shakespeare, his associate and correspondent for forty years. Besides these three women, Dorothy Wellesley also inspired his ballads in the last period of his career.

Influence of John O'Leary

It was about 1890 that Yeats met John O'Leary, a devoted Irish nationalist, patriot, fighter and champion of the Irish cause. He proved to be a guiding force in the young poet's life. It was through him that Yeats became acquainted with the works of the nationalist poets like Davis and Mangan, and became their devoted admirer. He joined the Young Ireland Society, and its debates inspired him with a patriotic urge, and he devoted himself to the task of recreating the past of Ireland and reviving the pride of the Irish in their own culture. Even his subject-matter became Irish. He not only drew symbols and images from Ireland's past, but also wrote on contemporary Irish political scene. Sometimes he did so out of John Leary's influence, sometimes out of his natural love for Ireland, but at times to impress his beloved Maud Gonne.

Influence of other Irish Friends

Yeats learnt from O'Leary the mystical ways of occultism. Other Irish minds which influenced him were Lady Gregory, Moore, Edward Martyn, J. M. Synge, etc. In 1889, Yeats, then twenty-four years old, gave some fatherly advice to an aspiring poetess. He wrote to her, "You will find it a good thing to make verse on Irish legends and places and so forth. It helps originality—and makes one's verses sincere, and gives one less numerous competitors. Besides, one should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life." Until he attained youth he preferred India of romance but later on he said, "presently I convinced myself......that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own." His *Letters* of 1890 reveal how seriously he took his new attitude. "All poetry," he writes, "should have a local habitation when at all possible. We should make poems on the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and glittering ones we wonder at." As soon as locality became important to him, he sought out all the imaginative connection with places that he could find. Local customs, local characters, local songs and stories, local expressions gave the landscape its 'look' more than sun or moon did. He wanted a personal, specialized, local language to go with his local setting. So "it was as an Irish poet that he aspired to become known, and now that he is dead the category seems more fully established and distinguished from the state of being an English poet. Yeats's Irishism is of a special kind. Like Joyce's prose, his poetry makes use of national and local borders only to transcend them. He is Irish ; he is also anti-Irish in an Irish way ; and his interest in Irishman is always subordinated to an interest in men. His method of treating his Irish background and subject-matter is, therefore, exceedingly complex. Ireland is his symbol for the world, and he is caught between estrangement and love for both."—(Richard Ellmann).

Influence of Theatre

Yeats's experience in the theatre gave him the realization that his quiz technique was unsuitable He then decided to be more direct, to give more meaning with less art. His experience in America was also making the need of clarity imperative. It was in the Theatre that he came in touch with a number of literary personalities. Synge and Gregory were the prominent ones among them. He drew from them the foils to his romantic figures, the Blind Man and the Fool, for instance, in *On Baile's Strand*.

Influence of Swedenborg

In 1913, Yeats studied Swedenborg. He stressed in his article on Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places. "It was indeed Swedenborg who affirmed for the modern world, against the abstract reasoning of the learned, the doctrine and practice of desolate places, of shepherds and of midwives, and discovered a world of spirits where there was scenery like that of the earth, human forms grotesque or beautiful senses that knew pleasure and pain, marriage and war, all that could be painted on canvas, or put into stories to make one's hair stand up."—(Hone). The study of Swedenborg revealed to Yeats the mysteries of spiritualism and the uncanny phenomena. It also deepened his faith.

The Infections of Symbolism

The religion which served as a means to purify and intensify Yeats's inner life was symbolism......and the high priest of great French Symbolist movement was Stephane Mallarme. Yeats accepted whole-heartedly Mallarme's conception of 'pure' poetry. Study of Blake and contact with Arthur Symons also fanned in him the conflict between realism and symbolism. His study of Pater also helped in weighing his scale towards symbolism. Whether Yeats took symbolism over from Pater or from the French romantics through Symons is a debatable question. That he somehow got it is sure, and was determined to use it for his own purposes.

Influence of Ezra Pound

Yeats came into contact with the poet and the propagandist, Ezra Pound, in 1916. The latter familiarized him with the Japanese Nohdrama. Pound insisted on precise verbal definitions, and summed up his creed in the following words :

> "The men of old wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart and then acting, first set up good government in their own states ; wanting good government in their own states, they first established order in their own families ; wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves ; desiring self-discipline, they rectified their own hearts ; and definitions of their inarticulate thoughts (the tones given off by the heart) ; wishing to attain precise verbal definitions, they set to extend their knowledge to the utmost. The completion of knowledge is rooted in sorting things into organic categories."

He emphasized clarity and precision. The new gospel had momentous effect on Yeats who was always anxious to learn the ways of his craft. He decided to change his whole practice ; in this purpose his assumption of a mask proved useful. He was now to associate with the normal active man and not be content to moon about things. The contents of the heart were of no use to anybody ; as he put it in his poem *The Mask* :

> "It was the mask that engaged your mind
> Not what's behind."

All words which sense did not justify, all abstractions were to be cast out as unwanted surplusage This had a revolutionary effect on his dramas, and his poetry was changed almost beyond recognition. He began to wither into truth. He could assume grand manner of an accepted master without feeling or betraying any self-consciousness.

It is perhaps because of Pound's influence that Yeats is no more in a world of dreams. Yeats as the poet of the shadow is dead ; instead is born a powerful and hard-hitting thinker who will not refine experience for the purpose of poetry, but force upon all recalcitrant material an artistic shape. His would be the esemplastic imagination which would fuse the most discordant material into a thing of art. For Yeats had not only met Pound, he had not only taken a notable share on the public life of his country and been a successful pamphleteer and controversialist, he had not only come near a heart-breaking love-affair and managed to survive it: he had been, and was now dealing with a spirit world which seemed to let him into truth denied to others ; he had made in the wake of Prof. Grierson and others, a rediscovery of Donne and the Metaphysicals.

Influence of Croce and Plotinus

As already stated, George Russell and Madame Blavatsky had encouraged him towards magic and supernaturalism. Through alchemy and astrology, Yeats came to believe that "life is no series of emanations from divine reason as the cabalists imagine, but an irrational bitterness, no ordinary descent from level to level, no waterfall but a whirlpool, a gyre"–(*A Vision*), and from this system he worked out an entire explanation of human character and destiny. He believed that the entire phenomenon of life was cyclic or like a giant wheel, directed by the two forces of the Sun and the Moon. The sun represents objectivity, the moon completes subjectivity. As the moon waxes and wanes, objectivity declines and increases. All human character can be explained in terms of the phases of the moon. And as with individuals, so also with the world as a whole. It has its subjective and objective phases; and so things go round. Seemingly simple in its broad outlines, the system is very complicated and full of technical words, like diamonds, tinctures, cones and gyres. etc. These became a part of Yeats's way of thinking; and as such they help to understand his poetry. One need not, however, believe all this abracadabra to appreciate Yeats's poetry ; for the poet had known enough from his past experience that Dame Ocupacycon will have no truce with esoteric symbols. His philosophy of *The Vision*, thus, was a result of the influence of Plotinus and Croce's 'General Will'. But Yeats's system has its points of differences and is not the exact replica of Plotinus's System of Soul of the World. Yeats had also the knowledge of Bishop Berkeley.

Although one may try hard and hard, one cannot trace out all the influences which go on to make a great genius. Yeats was a great genius and an artist. He could have been influenced by a number of factors. But ultimately he remained original and thought-provoking.

6. WORKS OF W. B. YEATS

Chronologically, we can list Yeats's works in the following manner :

(A) Poetry—

1. *The Juvenilia.* Immature early works of boyhood, not included in the collected works, (1885).
2. *The Crossways,* 1889, including poems first published as *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems.*
3. *The Rose*, 1893, including poems first published as *The Countess Cathleen and Other Poems.*
4. *The Wind Among the Reeds*, 1899.
5. *Adam's Curse and The Folly of Being Comforted*, 1902, first published in the *Monthly Review.*
6. *In the Seven Woods*, 1903.
7. *The Green Helmet and Other Poems*, 1910.
8. *Responsibilities*, 1914.
9. *The Wild Swans at Coole*, 1917.
10. *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, 1921.
11. *The Tower*, 1928.
12. *The Winding Stairs and Other Poems*, 1933, including the poems grouped *Words for Music Perhaps*, and *A Woman Young and Old.*
13. *A Full Moon in March*, 1935.
14. *Last Poem and Two Plays*, 1936-1939.
15. *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, (including all the above poems) edited by Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach.

(B) Plays—

1. *Mosada*, a dramatic poem, 1886.
2. *The Countless Cathleen*, 1892.
3. *The Land of Heart's Desire*, 1894.
4. *The Shadowy Waters*, 1900.
5. *Two Plays for Dancers*, 1919.
6. *Four Plays of Dancers*, 1921.
7. *Plays in Prose and Verse*, written for the Irish Theatres, 1922.

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8. *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, 1934.
9. *The Herne's Egg*, 1938.
10. *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats*, 1952.

(C) Prose Works—

1. *The Celtic Twilight*, 1893.
2. *The Secret Rose*, 1897.
3. *A Vision*, first edition, 1925.
4. *A Vision*, revised and enlarged edition, 1937.
5. *Autobiographies*, 1955.
6. *Mythologies*, 1959.
7. *Essays and Introductions*, 1961.
8. *Explorations*, 1962.
9. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, edited by Allen Wade, 1954.
10. *The Letters of the New Island*, 1934.
11. *Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, 1940.

(D) Works edited or translated by W. B. Yeats—

1. *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. 1883.
2. *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*, ed. 1893.
3. *A Book of Irish Verse*, selected by W. B. Yeats, 1895.
4. *Gitanjali* of Tagore, introduced by W. B. Yeats, 1913.
5. *An Indian Monk*, written by Purohit Swami and introduced by W. B. Yeats, 1932.
6. *Oxford Book of English Verse*, selected and introduced by W. B. Yeats, 1936.
7. *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, translated by Yeats and Purohit Swami, 1937.

[N. B. For detailed description of Yeats's poetical works, see next Section.]

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7. YEATS'S EARLY POETRY

[*First Phase : 1885-1899*]

Yeats's period of active literary production is rather long : it spans over fifty years. During such a long period Yeats's genius grew in various directions—these may be called the various phases of his poetry. In fact, as a poet, Yeats always went on growing and developing. His later poetry is a growth from and an evolution of the earlier creations, and it represents 'the consummation of a long and fruitful career'. It is also a reminder how a poet can and should develop. Although a poet's output and achievement can never be divided into watertight compartments but for the sake of convenience in study. Hence, these various phases of Yeats's poetry can be termed "The Early Poetry" (Beginning), "The Poetry of the Transitional Period" and "The Later Poetry (Middle), and the Poetry of the Last Phase (End)."

Some critics have called the earliest period of Yeats's poetry "The Celtic Twilight Period". This period covers the following poetical works :

1. *The Juvenilia* (1885),
2. *The Crossways* (1889),
3. *The Rose* (1893), and
4. *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899).

About Yeats's artistic development, a distinguished critic of Yeats writes : "The working life of Yeats as a poet extended to over half a century. During this long period many poetic fashions came and went ; as a dedicated spirit anxious to learn from wherever there was anything to learn, Yeats was touched by all these changing fashions ; his work may well be taken as an excellent barometer for registering poetic pressure over five long decades. When he had picked up all that various aestheticism had to teach him, he developed an artistic medium which was absolutely an unmistakable style. Nor is this alone. His approach to poetry was not merely formal. Poetry was an instrument in his search for a substitute religion. Anxious to avoid a spiritual shipwreck consequent on the shock which science gave to the conventional religion, he made poetry his instrument for groping in the dark for light."

This was the period when Yeats was framing and forming his ideas although he had no worthwhile belief. He himself says in his *Autobiographies* :

> "I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall whom I detested of the simple-minded religion of my childhood. I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition.....passed on from generation by poets and painters."

Before we discuss the general features of Yeats's early poetry, let us know something about Yeats's major poetical works.

(1) The Juvenilia

The Juvenilia is Yeats's earliest work. It contains poems in the imitation of Shelley and Spenser—*The Island of Statues*, *Mosada*, *The Seeker*, etc., and also poems on Indian themes, such as, *The Indian upon God*, *Kanva*, *Anashuya* and *Vijaya*. These poems were published in *The Dublin University Review* when Yeats was a student. They show his love for Arcadian pastorals with enchanted islands, mysterious flowers, timid shepherds and majestic ice-eyed queens. His love of folk-lore, too, is reflected in these works, which represent the shy and arrested expression of his gentle and youthful fancies.

One of the poems in this selection, "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" is a call to a vanishing world of dreaming as against the modern world of exact science. "The poet has decided to get away from the world of action and deeds, science and technology, into that of fancy and funs, the daffodil and lily." The happy shepherd is the symbol of a vanished age. It is in this world of pastoral simplicity that he has to get happiness.

Anashuya centres round Anashuya, a friend of Shakuntala in Kalidas's *Abhijan Shakuntalam.* Yeats makes Anashuya young priestess, worshipping in an Indian temple in the Golden Age. Within her heart is lurking her lover Vijaya. Her prayer is not only for her country and the King, but also for her lover's welfare. But she is jealous, and would have him eaten by the panther if he should love anyone else. Meanwhile, the lover walks in and the two engage in a little dialogue of love and longing, interspersed with fears of a rival. The girl then makes Vijaya swear 'by the parents of the gods......who dwell in sacred Himalayas on the far golden peak' that he will not love anybody else. The poet has tried to create an exotic atmosphere replete with Indian flora and fauna, plants and animals. The world of the Himalayan sages, birds and animals, the evocation of Brahma, Kamdeva and of the pilots of the stars make the piece successful. The atmosphere is quite romantic and fantastic.

The Indion Upon God is another poem that presents Indian scene and Indian thought. An Indian is shown having a stroll in the evening. He meets and is able to hear what the moorfowl, the lotus, the rosebuck and the peacock are saying by way of an evening prayer. Each of them imagines that God is like himself, only He is infinitely bigger. The poem has the tilting rhythm.

Poems of this period are poems of moods, they are renderings of an atmosphere, or a situation which is at once individual and typical. The beauty lies in the pen-pictures of ideal places or conditions of life. The poet would prefer defeatist mood and, like aesthetes, live in emotions and sensations ; he would prefer to run away to a world of fancy rather than face the crude realities. But he is really not clear as to where to go.

None-the-less, Yeats's father encouraged Yeats towards dramatic poetry. So Yeats wrote some poetic plays with romantic and remote atmosphere during this period. These poems and some others, as we would see, are dominated by the style of Pater and the pale romantics of the 'ninety's, with the colour and dreaminess of Rossetti which is, later, infused with 'The Celtic Twilight' and Irish mythology, mixed with magic and occultism. It is a poetry of escape into the land of the heart's desire, with a haunting incantatory rhythm and decorative drapery of strange symbolism, calculated to produce a hypnotic effect.

(2) The Crossways

This is the most representative work of the Celtic Twilight Period of Yeats. It was entitled *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems.* The principal work, "*The Wanderings of Oisin*" is a long narrative, in three parts dealing with the life of the Celtic, legendary hero 'Oisin' (pronounced—'Usheen'). Oisin is Finn's son. He is loved by Niamh, the fairy creature. She leads him to her kingdom where he enjoys hunting and fishing. He also visits a few other islands. In one of such islands, like England, he finds that a demon is keeping a fair lady in captivity. Oisin fights with the demon for about a century. After a hundred years' fight, they depart to the land of oblivion. He wakes up after one hundred years and decides to meet his friends in Ireland. He loiters on his fairy horse, and as soon as he touches the earth, he is transformed into an old, decrepit man and dies hearing the Christian bell in the church.

"*The Wanderings of Oisin* is an autobiographical work which portrays Yeats's life at Sligo, London and Howth. Yeats is Oisin, and it is he who has become old, as is evident from the letter written by the poet to Katharine Tynan of September 6, 1888. The work is symbolic."—(D. K. Lal). In this poem, Yeats has imbibed certain traits of Pre-Raphaelitisms. The metaphors and images are like those employed by Rossetti. The influence of the Rhymers Club, and Symons' *The Symbolist Movement* can also be seen.

The verses in this volume were later revised and published in the "Collected Edition" as the *Crossways*. The collection consists of short dramatic sketches, meditative and fanciful lyrics, ballads, songs and quatrains. *The Song of the Happy Shepherd*, *The Stolen Child*, *Down by the Sally Gardens*, and *The Ballad of Moll Magee* are some of the finest pieces in this collection. The work, though immature, is of a wide literary significance.

(3) The Rose

The Rose (1893), the slim volume of poems, shows Yeats's acceptance of symbolism either through Pater or the French romantics through Symons or both. His immediate purpose was to fuse his experience of the glory that was Maud Gonne with the mystery of Irish mythology. The volume was previously captioned *The Countess Cathleen*. It also includes the exquisite lyric, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*.

The Rose is the central symbol in these poems—"Red Rose, Proud Rose, Sad Rose of all my days" as Yeats names it. As Edmund Wilson says, "The Danaan Children, the Shadowy Horses and Fergus with his brazen Cars—those mysterious and magical beings who play so large a part in Yeats's verse—have little more objective reality than the images of Mallarme ; they are the elements and the moods of Yeats's complex sensibility. But they have a more satisfactory character than such a French symbolist mythology as Mallarme's......because they constitute a world of which one can to some extent get the hang, where one can at least partly find one's way about." "There is an all-round impression of mistiness ; waters are 'mouse-gray', the moon is 'curd-pale,' and the poet is making a virtue of this dimness." "I see, indeed," wrote Yeats "in the of every country whose faint lights and faint colours and faint outlines and faint energies which many call the decadence, and which I, because I believe that the arts lie dreaming of things to come, prefer to call the autumn of the body. An Irish poet, whose rhythms are like the cry of a sea-bird in autumn twilight, has told its meaning in the line 'the very sunlight's weary, and it's time to quit the plough.' Its importance is great because it comes to us at the moment when we are beginning to be interested in many things, which positive science interpreter of exterior law has always denied ; communion of mind with mind in thought and without words, for knowledge in the dreams and visions, and the coming among us of the dead and much else."

The Countess Cathleen deals with a mythology, Ireland had forgotten and England had never known. For Arthur and his Round Table, Yeats substituted the very different con-chamber and his Red Branch Warriors, and Finn and his Fenians. It is the story of a high-minded lady who sold her soul to the devil rather than let her countrymen starve. It is the poet's conception of Maud Gonne's beauty and nobility of soul. Countess Cathleen is a symbol in which he has put the haunting beauty of body and soul of the lady (Maud Gonne) Yeats loved.

None-the-less, in *The Rose*, Yeats began to use material from the Gaelic legends, the Cuchulain saga and the tales of the Fianna. The first poem of this collection is entitled, *The Countess Cathleen* and the last *To Ireland in the Coming Times*. Yeats's craftsmanship is 'more confident and more co-ordinated than in his earlier writing.'[1]

(4) The Wind among the Reeds

The Wind among the Reeds was published in the year 1899. Poetry here is more refined and complex. In this volume, the influence of the symbolists like Mallarme, Villiers de L'Isle Adam and Maeterlinck is more clearly seen than anywhere else in Yeat's work, but the Irish figures and Irish themes still form the bulk of his symbols. "The poetry of *The Wind among the Reeds* then is a very remarkable achievement ; it is, though a poetry of withdrawal, both more subtle and more vital than any product of Victorian romanticism."[2]

By the time this work appeared, Yeats had already had a foretaste of magic, astrology, occultism, theosophy, crystalgazing, etc., and the volume shows the impact of his new interests. "There is little of ease and systematic simplicity in it. There is a prophet-like tone ; and it is less an unpremeditated thing than an artifact ; it is thought of as a talisman or '*yantra*' made by some medieval magician ; it was to be meditated upon for hours rather than read in a hurry ;

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[1] **B. Rajan,** *W. B. Yeats* **(Hutchinson University Library, London, 1965), p. 30.**

[2] **James Hall and Martin Steinmann, ed.,** *The Permanence of Yeats*, **F. R. Leavis's Essay, p. 152.**

and then, a bit of divine reality will be seen in it. The poet is a seer, who has pensively worked himself into a receptive mood ; to him has come a revelation ; he has netted it, as if it were, in words ; and patient contemplation of it will make the truth over to the reader."[1]

"Several influences," says Dr. B. Rajan, "contribute to its characteristic quality, unrequited love in Yeats's personal life, the influence of symbolism on his literary mind, his deepening interest in esoteric wisdom, and his consequent conviction that the 'invisible gates' were about to open, that 'a crowning crisis of the world' was imminent which would renew belief in a supersensual reality. The result is a poetry of the twilight, solemn, ceremonious and remote, and at the same time intensely and evocatively personal, a poetry which represents the farthest advance of Yeats's movement in the direction of the dream."[2]

The main theme of this collection is love. The wind is the central symbol of vague desires and aspirations But love is expressed through legends. Names like Knocknarea, Clooth-na-Bare, Danaan Children, Aengus, Cairns and Cromlechs, Cumhal and Dathi, Dooney, Kilvarnet, etc., help in revealing the poet's vision.

The Wind among the Reeds is a more variegated collection than the remarks of some of its critics suggest. The incantatory lyrics are strongly associated with the volume. Poems like *Into the Twilight, The Lover Mourns for the Loss of Love*, which, after an all too characteristic opening, moves unexpectedly into an area of ordinary speech, and immediate feelings are more direct and symbolic. "The impact which the poems still make is not because of their often ornate craftsmanship, but because of the corrective force of the personal element in them which humanises the otherwise sedative mixture of the 'Celtric Twilight' and the "Golden Dawn'."[3]

The general view of the critics is that *The Wind among the Reeds*, together with *The Shadowy Waters*, represent Yeats's most extreme commitment to the poetry of the dream. According to Jeffares, *The Wind among the Reeds* is a "final poetry written for poetry's sake, for beauty's sake, and the swan song of his '*fin de siecle* composition'." In Leavis's opinion, "The poetry of *The Wind among the Reeds*, then, is a very remarkable achievement ; it is, though a poetry of withdrawal, both more subtle and more vital than any pure product of Victorian romanticism."[4]

Main Features of Yeats's Early Poetry

Yeats's early poetry is dominated by the style of Pater and the pale romantics of the 'ninety's, with the colour and dreaminess of

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[1] B. P. Misra, *W. B. Yeats* (Kitab Mahal, 1962), p. 18.

[2] B. Rajan, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[3] B. Rajan, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[4] F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*.

Rossetti, which is, later, infused with 'the Celtic Twilight' and Irish mythology, mixed with magic and occultism. It is a poetry of escape into the land of the heart's desire, with a haunting incantatory rhythm and decorative drapery of strange symbolism, calculated to produce a hypnotic effect. In the concluding Poem of *The Rose*, Yeats presented his work as taking shape in the lamplight of eternity :

"For round about my table go,
The magical powers to and fro,
In flood and fire and clay and wind,
They huddle from man's pondering mind."

—To Ireland in the Coming Times.

Yeats emerges as a great myth-maker. The early poetry is really a poetry of escape which transports the reader as well as the poet to a dreamworld of phantasy, dealing with Irish countryside, folklore, peasant beliefs and traditions. The poet escapes from the world of solid and substantial reality into an insubstantial fairy-world of Irish mythology. In the beginning, this imaginary world is an ideal domain in the down-toned English romantic tradition. The poet is under the influences of Arcadia, Spenser and Shelley. He is seen escaping to an imaginary island, say, of Innisfree, to a perfect world where he may get some rest and relief, he seems tired of this world of fever and fret, of cruelty and injustice. There is a wistful longing for a utopia :

"Come away, O human child !
To the water and the wild
With a fairy, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you understand."

—The Stolen Child.

Gradually, Yeats begins to write on Irish themes and captures the Celtic spirit. As Prof. A. G. Stock observes, "Yeats has succeeded in capturing the very spirit of a folk-song, 'the spirit which makes it wander round the world without any questioning'." The human beings are few and they belong to ancient times or to all times. There are druids and heroes from old legends and uncertainly medieval queens There is a plethora of supernatural beings, fairies, angelic entities, 'wayward twilight companies' and 'flaming multitudes,' with 'their long wings, the flash of their white feet'.

Philosophically, Yeats's early poetry is double-edged. On the one hand, it shows the poet's yearning for an idyllic, utopian, pastoral, dreamy fairy world, but on the other hand, it gives an idea that one cannot escape reality, and that the mortal beings cut off from the real world cannot be happy and content, and that they cannot enjoy the bills of peace even in their graves. Hence, as Prof. A. G. Stock points out, the prevailing mood of these escape-poems is one of irresponsible delight, but there is a faint undertone of foreboding ; as if a child gives his hand to the elemental spirits, innocently in love with their wildness, and another present is silently aware that this gift to their devotees is an agony of loneliness.

Nonetheless, the dominant note of this early poetry of Yeats is that of disillusionment ; he is disillusioned with life ; he is dissatisfied with it ; he is in a dilemma to reject or not to reject this world. His discontent with life arises from three causes : (1) His monkish hatred for science and increasing ugliness and barrenness of an industrial civilization, (2) his consciousness of the conflict and tensions of human life, and (3) his awareness of the transitoriness of youth and beauty. He detests the ugly, and wants either this world becomes an ideal abode, or he flies to another one far away from the ugliness of the present one.

"All things uncomely and broken,
All things worn out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway,
The creak of a lumbering cart
Are wronging your image
That, blossoms a rose in the deep of my heart."

he declares in the *Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart.*

The earlier poetry of Yeats kept to one general manner for some fifteen years, from the middle eighties to the end of the century. The influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, followed by that of the French symbolists and of Walter Pater, and by his association with Arthur Symons and the Yellow Book group, brought him very close to the poets who embraced the theory of Art for Art's sake. "Grey truth is now her painted toy," he said of the modern world, and he would have none of it, holding that "words alone are certain good," the beauty of poetry, the only lasting turn. From the current day and the present place he sought refuge in singing of fairyland "of old Eire, and the ancient ways." In several poems, Yeats used the Rose as a symbol, noting later that "the quality symbolized as the Rose differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and Spenser" in that he had imagined it as suffering with man, and not as something pursued and seen from afar. Suffering, indeed, is the sad tone of most of these early poems.

The Sad Shepherd speaks of a "man whom Sorrow named his friend." The poet will "make the clock of Sorrow" ; he imagines himself dreaming as he lies "buried under the sleepy ground," or he speaks through an old man who has come to feel that the Junes were warmer, the waves grayer, the herrings more plentiful, the girls prettier "when I was a boy with never a crack in my heart." It is "the hour of the waning of love," and where love holds the world is no place for it, but "I would that we were my beloved white birds on the foam of the sea."

Poem after poem express this feeling of world-weariness, the decadent note and boredom, for

"Time and the world are ebbing away
In twilights of dew and fire."

The poet is frustrated, full of wistful longing and would like to remake the world "like a casket of gold". No happiness, no love, no beauty is possible in this world :

> "They will find no other face fair
> Till all the valleys of the world have withered away
> Until the axle break."

Under "The blue and the dim and the dark cloths of night and light and the half-light" of these early poems lies,

> "Beauty grown sad with its eternity
> Made you and us, and of the dim Grey Sea."

Hence, the poet thinks it better to pray and wish for his beloved's death :

> "O would, beloved, that you lay
> Under the dock-leaves in this ground,
> While lights were paling one by one."

Previously, Yeats had used Irish myths merely as stories, but now he uses them as symbols to express his personal states of mind.

As regards Yeats's early lyrics about Ireland, we can say that poetry is mixed with patriotism, and Yeats deserves to be the first national poet of young Ireland. In one of his such lyrics he proclaims his mission :

> "Know, that I would accounted be
> True brother of a company
> That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong."

His ballads exploit the ancient Celtic legendary personages. His ballads on King Goll, Aengus, Oisin are the best among them. They have the characteristic directness, simplicity and naturalness of a real folk-song, and the traditional ballad metre has been manipulated with great good skill. Like the traditional ballads, his ballads, too, are remarkable for their directness and simplicity of treatment, complete objectivity and community appeal, tragic tone and simplicity of versification.

As regards language and imagery, he is swept off by the lure of words. His poetry is packed with a profusion of Pre-Raphaelite *decor*. It is in the Tennyson-Rossetti-Morris tradition. The sprinkling of phrases, such as, "the pearl-pale hand," "dream-awakened eyes," "dew-dropping sky," "cloud-pale eyelids," "dew-cold lilies," along with colour words—'golden', 'silver', 'blue,' 'dim', 'grey', 'light', 'half-light', etc., all recall to our mind the characteristics of Keats, Tennyson and Morris. By the use of such sweet-sounding, tender and dainty words, the poet is able to produce appropriate atmospheric effect. His landscapes are covered with cold, uncertain lights and half-lights, creating an atmosphere of mystery of phantasy and of remoteness.

His imagery at this period is designed merely to decorate without any operative significance of its own. His images come forth in a stream. His Keatsian word-pictures have a procession-like effect. Samples of this type of imagery are given below.

(i) Old like the wandering moon.
(ii) Like coloured Asian birds.
(iii) Laughter like murmur of the sea.
(iv) Wool 'whiter than sea-froth'.
(v) The brows of a lady 'white as fragrant milk'.

Though this is a fascinating imagery, yet it has little organic relation with the poem concerned. At this stage, in his early poetry, he is more concerned to communicate the images themselves than the thoughts behind them. So most of his images are decorative rather than functional As Prof. Stock says, "At this stage, he is more concerned to communicate the images themselves than the thoughts behind them ; but many poems repay close study, for, as one image evokes another, they light up other poems and the pattern of the mind grows clear." Prof. A. G. Stock further writes : "At this early stage, his rhythms are formal, not mechanical, they hesitate often, like a mind feeling its way to exactitude rather than asserting a dogma, but they never lose their music." In another observation, he opines, "Yeats's rhythms at this stage of his work are half entranced, like a man walking alone lost in a train of visionary thoughts, or incantatory as if he thought of poetry as priestly vocation."

8. YEATS'S POETRY OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD
OR
THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

[*Second Phase—1900-1915*]

The Wind among the Reeds is a turning-point in the history of Yeats's development as a poet, with the turn of the century and Yeats's Essay (1901), on "What is Popular Poetry ?" a new wind begins to blow, and the years between 1900 and 1915 may be known as the period of transition in Yeats's poetic development. Various factors combined to draw Yeats out of his ivory tower. His frustration in love—Maud Gonne married Major Macbride in 1903—fundamentally reshaped his attitude towards poetry. So bitterness of frustrated love, his dissatisfaction with the Irish people who had hissed Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, the disillusionment caused by the pettiness and meanness of real life which he experienced during his involvement in public controversies, like the Lane-Controversy, his connection with the Abbey Theatre, the selfishness and hypocrisy of Irish politicians, his contact with Synge who advised him, "before verse can be human again, it must learn to be brutal," study of Blake, and contact with Arthur Symons and Ezra Pound, his entanglement with Theosophy and other short-cuts to the secrets of the soul, all helped to bring Yeats down to earth.

Hence, the poetry of this period shows a keen sense of life and reality, and is again full of disillusionment, impatience and indignation.

As Graham Hough has explained, Yeats was soon frustrated with the Aestheticism of the Pre-Raphaelites as well as the religious themes. Pre-Raphaelitism for him was mainly a movement of ideas. He found its natural continuation in the work of the *poetes maudits* of the 'nineties, Dowson and Lionel Johnson, and he attached himself to their school with the fervour he was wont to give to all mystic brotherhoods. But Yeats could not remain satisfied with it. Ireland with its relative simplicity of life and its stock of legends still active in the minds of the peasants could provide a better soil for the poet's passions to find maturity. He was passing through conflicting ideas which may be seen even in his essay of 1901. The general answer was 'symbolism'. The religious and political ideas of Yeats only explained man's life in false and inadequate terms, and because they cut men's minds off from the images and emotions that had once carried their memories backwards thousand of years.

The poet began to think that poetry, having been emptied of impurities and miscellaneous rubbish, can only be filled again, not by images excogitated in the study but by a new mythology that could be valid in a wider world. Mallarme was the best refuge for this purpose. According to Prof. Pinto, Yeats began as a late Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite with the additional advantage of contact with Irish mythological tradition and folk culture. What is remarkable about his whole career is his sustained power of development. He could not remain a poet of the Celtic Twilight. In the second phase of his early poetry, represented by *The Wind among the Reeds* and *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), he is making the voyage within, withdrawing as much as possible from the contemporary world and enriching his inner life by concentrating on purely visionary themes. This phase of his work is comparable with Hopkin's arduous spiritual training as a Jesuit. The religion which served as a means to purify and intensify Yeats's inner life was Symbolism, and the high priest of the great French Symbolist movement was Stephane Mallarme. Yeats was never a good French scholar, but Arthur Symons's translations of Mallarme's poems were as useful to him as Golding's "Ovid" was to Shakespeare. Mallarme's religion was austere worship of absolute beauty, which was to be reached by the rapt contemplation of symbols. His poetry is a poetry of suggestion from which all prosaic elements are banished. As Dr. Bowra has written, "All preliminaries, explanations, comparisons are omitted and the gain in concentration is enormous, the poetry is full packed. It has some of the direct appeal of music."

Yeats accepted whole-heartedly Mallarme's conception of pure poetry. In his essay on 'The Symbolism of Poetry', he called for a return to the way of our fathers, a casting out of description of nature for the sake of nature, of the moral law for the sake of the moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of that brooding over scientific opinion that so often extinguished the central flame in Tennyson.

Yeats had come to the conclusion that poetry should not escape from the real life, there should not be a rejection of real life, but an acceptance of it. So his themes became realistic, imagination was rescued from abstractions, he realizes that there was more enterprise in "walking naked". He also made his style more definite and precise. He makes a kind of confession in his letter to Katharine Tynan that his earlier poetry was confused, incoherent, and inarticulate. In one of his poems, *The Coming of Wisdom with Time*, he asserts :

> "Through all the days of my youth,
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun,
> Now I may wither into the truth."

Yeats at this stage makes searching self-introspection and rejects his earlier line of poetry. He is more and more involved in 'the externality', in the confusion of the contemporary Irish scene, and feels an urge to express his own reaction to it. His themes become more realistic. In the opening lines of *The Seven Woods* (1940), he writes :

> "I have forgot awhile
> Tara uprooted, and new commonness
> Upon the throne and crying about the streets
> And hanging its paper flowers from post to post
> Because it is alone of all things happy."

These are the lines which were written in 1902 on the coronation festivities of Edward VII. Prof. A. G. Stock observes, "Yeats in retreat from them, is walking in the woods of Coole Park, Lady Augusta Gregory's country-house. It is as if the dreamer of *The Wind among the Reeds* has opened his eyes for a moment on the contemporary world rollicking around him and turned away from it in distaste. A reader of the early Yeats might be less surprised that he had forgotten the paper flowers on the lamp-posts than that he had deigned to remember them at all. The descent into an actual time and place is a new departure in his poetry ; and in this thin book of fourteen poems there is a good deal that is new."

In *The Adam's Curse*, Yeats deals realistically with a personal experience, and incidentally tells us of his poetic methods. His scope of subject-matter widened. Not that the old themes have been abandoned, but the newer ones keep intruding. He can still write of *Red Hanahan's Song about Ireland* in his earlier manner, but something has gone wrong, as he tells us, "I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde."

The tone of the new poetry is that of bitterness and frustration which is caused by failure and frustration in love and his criticism as a poet and a participant in Irish National movement. "He was also irritated by the pettiness and meanness of the ordinary citizen with whom his work in Ireland brought him into constant contact. Now there is a bitterness in his poetry that is far removed from the plaintive melancholy of his earlier work."—(David Daiches). In *The Adam's Curse*, we are told that the common people are a "noisy set" who cannot appreciate the pains and labour involved in artistic creation. His indignation is expressed in the following manner :

"...............My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,
On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre, business, management of men."

Because,

"The fascination of what is difficult
Had dried the sap out of my veins, and rent,
Spontaneous joy and natural content,
Out of my heart."

The love-poetry of this time is imbued in this very sentiment of bitterness and disillusionment. The tone is more realistic and mood more complex, and the poet comes out of his isolated retreat into the world of concrete reality and adorns his verse with events and facts of the day-to-day life. Now the soapbubble colours vanish, the music of fairyland dies away, we behold only, carthy and clear, and bare outlines of cold Clare rock and Galway rock and horn. The poet begins to learn a new vocabulary and new technique. Instead of florid and musical words, now he uses prosaic words of everyday speech and concentrates on the gross essence of thought. His diction assumes a colloquial, harsh, rugged and prosaic character :

"A cursing rogue with a merry face,
A bundle of rags upon a crutch,
Stumble upon that windy place."

—*The Hour Before Dawn.*

Or,

"Sweetheart, do not love too long ;
I loved long and long,
And grew to be out of fashion
Like an old song."

and again,

"Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,
Although I have come close on forty-nine
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine."

There is, therefore, an austerity, an absence of ornament. The imagery is precise. Directness, economy and precision are the key-notes of Yeats's style at this period. The poet's rhythms are no longer incantatory, but come closer to the rhythms of normal everyday speech. Besides the stylistic changes, the period is also remarkable for the mythopoeic gifts and metaphysical techniques.

"He is 'withering into the truth'. He could assume the grand manner of an accepted master without feeling or betraying any self-consciousness. He is no more in a world of dreams." Yeats as the poet of the shadows is dead, instead is born a powerful and hard-hitting thinker who will not refine experience for the purpose of poetry, but force upon all recalcitrant material an artistic shape His would be the esemplastic imagination which would fuse the mos. discordant material into a thing of art. For Yeats had not only met Pound ; he had not only taken a notable share in the public life ot his country, and been a successful pamphleteer and controversialist f he had not only come near a heart-breaking love-affair and managed; to survive it ; he had been, and was now, dealing with a spirit world which seemed to let him into truth denied to others ; he had made, in the wake of Prof. Grierson and others, a rediscovery of Donne and the metaphysicians. His vision had been sharpened, and he felt that poetry had lost its power to grapple with discordant material. Most poets had been simplifying, and therefore, perhaps falsifying reality, by taking the line of least resistance. They had ignored the puzzling complexity of experience. Yeats saw the need of seeing life whole and seeing it steadily, and communicating what he had seen in words of bare sheer penetrating power. He realized that "there's more enterprise in walking naked."

The major works of this transitional period can be listed as follows :

1. *Adam's Curse* (1902).
2. *The Folly of Being Comforted* (1903).
3. *In the Seven Woods* (1904).
4. *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910).
5. *Responsibilities* (1914).

Adam's Curse signifies a change in Yeats's style and thought. He will have fewer images and clearer outlines. Before the Fall, things were beautiful ; life was free from the need of labour. Since then, anyone seeking perfection in expression had to work hard. The poet was one day sitting with a friend, a beautiful old woman, and talked on poetry. The poet was expatiating on the need of fundamental brain-work in the art of writing poetry. The woman brought in her experience—"We must labour to be beautiful." The poet added that not only in literature but also in love, it is necessary to work hard and not rely on the rule of thumb methods.

According to Prof. A. G. Stock, "The most elaborate poem in this new style is *Adam's Curse*, which has for theme the twin passions of poetry and love. They are talking of both, and like a symbol of beauty's laboured perfection, there appears in the sky—

"A moon, worn as if it had been a shell

Washed by time's water as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years"

—and then, as instantly and quietly as a blinking of the eyes of thought, the symbols turn its other face as he remembers how the long labour of love—

"......had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon."

"It was love, not poetry, which had grown weary-hearted. This poem was written before the day in 1903 when a telegram, handed to him as he was about to begin a lecture, told him that Maud had married MacBride. The news was so stunning that he gave the lecture as if he had not received it ; but *Adam's Curse* shows that in his heart he knew already what the marriage could only confirm. His love was irrevocable, its object unattainable, his youth gone."

The Folly of Being Comforted (1903) "begins in a matter-of-fact manner, and seems to deal with a mere anecdote. A friend said to him on the occasion that Maud Gonne married another, that she had already some threads of grey in her hair, and that time will make her age fast, and the poet may live to realize that it was perhaps good not to get married to her. This was a challenge to the nobility of his love. The poet believed that he was not mad about her because of her eyes or face. No, his love was pegged much higher. It was due to a certain nobility in her entire being. The fact that time will destroy her beauty does not comfort the poet at all. On the other hand, her grace will increase with time. Maturity will give her still greater poise than youth had given her. The poem ends with the realization that if any one could see her face, he would know the folly of being comforted." The theme, thus, is quite common-place.

The Folly of Being Comforted begins with a surprising recognition :

"One that is ever kind said yesterday,
Your well-beloved's hair has threads of grey.
And little shadows come about her eyes ;
Time can but make it easier to be wise......"

The matter-of-factness balances and validates the romantic assertion when it returns with its old intensity :

"Time can but make her beauty over again :
Because of that great nobleness of hers
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,
Burns but more clearly."

In the Seven Woods (1904) is a collection of fourteen new poems like *The Happy Townland*, *The Players Ask for a Blessing*, *Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation*, *The Abbey Theatre*, *A Drinking Song*, *To the Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription*, *Agitation Against Immoral Literature*, etc. All these poems suggest contemporary setting and contemporary events.

In The Seven Woods poems are still in the symbolist manner but in one at least there is a new note of sharp satire and realism :

"Better go down upon your marrow bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper in all kinds of weather ;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, school masters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world."

At the end of the collection, Yeats placed the remarkable poem called *The Happy Townland*, which might be called his farewell to symbolism. In one sense of the term he always remained a symbolist, but the symbolism of the school of Mallarme was too inhuman a doctrine to provide a permanent home for his rich and vital personality. In *The Happy Townland* he uses the popular Irish myth of a fairy-world of ideal happiness where men are freed from the cares of material existence, but now instead of conceiving it in the vague, misty manner of his early poem, he paints it in sharp, brilliant colours and concrete forms :

"Boughs have their fruit and blossom
At all times of the year ;
Rivers are running over
With red beer and brown beer.
An old man plays the bagpipes
In a gold and silver wood ;
Queens, their eyes blue like ice,
Are dancing in a crowd."

The happy townland is a place of danger as well as beauty and the traveller is warned :

"The little fox he murmured,
'O what of the world's bane?'
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein ;
But the little red fox murmured,
'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane'."

"This poem is a turning-point in Yeats's development. He had made the Voyage within and had discovered the beauty of the Inner Life, but he had also discovered that it was a terrible, inhuman beauty......'the world's bane'. This discovery made him the master, not the servant of the terror."—(Pinto).

The beginning of the new Yeats is clearly to be found in the poems published with *The Green Helmet* in 1910. From these poems the romantic decoration, the mythology and the vague incantatory music of his earlier works have almost been entirely banished. In their place there is terse unadorned language and rhythms of an almost Wordsworthian simplicity. The emotion communicated by Yeats's earlier lyrics is nearly always vague and remote. In the poems published with *The Green Helmet*, there is a new immediacy and concreteness. For instance, the poem called *No Second Troy* unlike the early poems on Maud Gonne, make the reader share not a vague general emotion but a particular experience :

"Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurried the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire ?
What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
What beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern ?
Why, what could she have done, being what she is ?
Was there another Troy for her to burn ?"

The fourth line of this poem illustrates the new concreteness of this phase of Yeats's poetry and also a new power of including in poetic experience material from daily life which had hitherto been avoided. The poem is not a contemplation of abstract love, but a successful attempt to show what it is like to love a particular beautiful woman who is also a political agitator.

As Dr. B. Rajan observes, "Yeats is more confident now about his accomplishment as a poet. He has come into his strength and words obey his call. Many things have tempted him from the craft of verse, but, in the end, the craft has triumphed ;

"Now nothing but comes readier to the hand
Than this accustomed toil."

But the real value of the triumph is disputable. As Helen—Maud passes across the stage of Yeats's judgment—

"......life and letters seem
But an heroic dream."

Language is always worthless than what it expresses—

"I might have thrown poor words away
And been content to live."

So love and dream are not his only themes. In *The Green Helmet* he suddenly drops his aloofness and becomes a man of the world, a satirist and a thinker with clear-cut, unpopular views. This work is pervaded with a haughty contempt for democracy, a feeling for traditionally heroic and aristocratic virtues, more positive than anything in the dreamy aloofness of the earlier books. The love poems are full of it. Maud Gonne, who.

"......would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,

Or, hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire"

is pardoned because she is most unlike the rebel she stirs up :

"......with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern."

Responsibilities, the collection of Yeats's poems published in the year 1914, is another turning-point in Yeats's development as a poet. In these poems he widens the scope of his subject matter to include ironic commentary on contemporary affairs. The splendid Elegy on O'Leary is poetry made out of the stuff of contemporary life, and of the poet's contempt for its sordid spirit of money-grubbing :

"What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone ;
For men were born to pay and save ;
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave."

Now instead of the remote mythology of Gaelic legend he creates a new mythology out of the memory of the patriots of eighteenth-century Ireland who still lived in the popular imagination :

"Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide ;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave ?"

Here the language is that of common speech but, as in Synge's poems, it is ennobled by sheer intensity of passion. Yeats has come out of the ivory tower of symbolism, but he has brought with him a power capable of transforming contemporary actualities into the material of high poetry. The poem called *A Coat* is at once a searching self-criticism and a manifesto of a new art which would no longer evade actualities :

"I made my song a coat
Out of old mythologies,
From heel to throat
Covered with embroideries
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.

Song, let them take it.
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked."

The title of the poem *Responsibilities* provides a clue to its understanding. There are supernatural responsibilities, social responsibilities, personal responsibilities and aesthetic responsibilities, and the functions of irresponsibilities. Several poems grouped under this title may be divided into the categories of the past, the present and the future responsibilities. Within the range of this collection fall poems dealing with the work of the theatre and other Irish controversies (*At the Abbey Theatre*, *On Those that Hated the Playboy* ......and the poems on the Municipal Gallery Controversy, *To A Shade To a Wealthy Man Paudeen* and others). The bitterness and masculinity of these poems remind us of Yeats's old, favourite story about Raftery cursing the bush that declined shelter to him so that it withered up. The poems relate to one another by composing a drama in which different personalities or personifications sustain fixed antithetical roles. On one side, there is the crowd and its leaders ; the speaker's contempt for them is rooted in comminatory generalizations and purgative dismissals—"they" (they are at their old tricks yet), *Paudeen* and *Biddy th' Onion-sellers* men who are born to pray and save and fumble in a greasy till (September, 1913), the "brazen throat," an "old foul-mouth," eunuchs in Hell ; they buy and sell, hunt down the noble quarry, do not understand. On the other side, are their victims, whose labour and service are rejected, all the feeling that is represented by Yeats's attacks in the essays in *Samhain* on newspaper attempts to curb the National Theatre's freedom of expression : "Literature is, to my mind, the great teaching power of the world, the ultimate creator of all values......(It) must take the responsibilitity of its power and keep all its freedom."

Without abandoning symbol, Yeats admitted into his verse the dramatization of personal ties and of the poet as teacher and victim. In *Responsibilities*, he has changed from defence to attack. Not only was aristocracy the necessary guardian of art, but on the honour of art civilization itself depended. Again it was Coole Park that led him into battle, in the storm over Sir Hugh Lane's collection of pictures.

In *Responsibilities*, too, there is a group of love-poems, answering to the group in the earlier volume, of which *Friends* and *The Cold Heaven* show a deepening of experience and mastery of line and organization which make them Yeats's greatest achievements in this kind. Neither are difficult poems, although *The Cold Heaven* has at first sight an irrationality which turns out to be a deep realism ; a linking of experience with inference from it which is "like life", because it happens so often and is perhaps the way we perceive the world. *The Cold Heaven*, says, Peter Ure, is one of Yeats's greatest poems, one of that great lyrics in English, a poem one can never finish describing, and yet which does not need to be described at all, for it describes itself by what it does. Other poems in *Responsibilities*, in their relaxation and gaiety, their conversationalism, and their easy handling of wisdom, give expression to a mood that was to emerge more and more in Yeats's art.

There are the five poems about the beggars, the irresponsibles : *The Three Beggars*, *The Three Hermits*, *Beggar to Beggar Cried*, *Running to Paradise*, *The Hour Before Dawn* *The Three Hermits*, Yeats told Lady Gregory, was "my first poem which is comedy or tragi-comedy." Beggars and wanderers, we ought to remember, were not for Yeats simple creatures out of the medieval past; but common enough in the Ireland of his youth. Here he turns them into the *Personae* of little moral dramas in order to illustrate his perceptions about human living and the intuitive wisdom of the outcast ; they are objectifications, in their way, of the *poete maudit* theme, at once a mockery of his toil, of his longing for sexual comfort and peace, and a celebration of the artist's freedom from social conventions and middle-class ambitions, although we can never be sure whether the third hermit in *The Three Hermits* is a saint or a poet ; giddy with his hundredth year, he "sang unnoticed like a bird," dramatization of the outcast, his fears and wisdom, in their humorous speech, and in the curious lightness with which they treat of unaccommodated man, stripped of his lendings when all boughs are bare, they have a Shakespearean quality which look back to *The Hour Glass* and forward to the Crazy Jane poems. Their themes link with those of *The Grey Rock*, the longest and most ambitious poem in the volume, about the Rhymers' responsibility to their art, about Florence Farr's longing for an impossible love, and about Cuchulain —Adapted from Petre Ure, *Yeats*).

9. YEATS'S LATER POETRY

[*Third Phase : 1919-1933*]

This phase of Yeats's poetry covers the years from 1919 to 1933. This is the phase of maturity and complexity for Yeats's poetry. Under this period fall the following works :

1. *The Wild Swans at Coole*, (1919).
2. *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, (1921).
3. *The Tower*, (1928).
4. *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, (1933).

With the completion of *The Responsibilities*, Yeats had freed himself from his immature earlier style and manner, obtained mastery over his craft and greater confidence in his powers, and fought his way into the 20th century. The poetry of this period is an improvement both in style and technique of the middle period. There is greater intensity and complexity of designs coupled with greater simplicity of style and manner. The poetry of this period pushed Yeats into the rank of the greatest of English poets.

The *Responsibilities* were criticized for merely dealing with subjects of local interest, and for expression and inspiration below the mark. C. L. Wrenn denounced this poem on these grounds ; so did Forest Reid. But Yeats's further work, *The Wild Swans at Coole* puts such critics in the wrong. This collection represents Yeats's return to a period of comparative calm. He had been conscious of his responsibilities to Ireland, and in the earlier volume had openly and unreservedly defended Hugh Lane, Synge and Parnell.

Prof. Pinto rightly writes, "Yeats's most memorable and important poetry was not written till he was over fifty. It is to be found in the series of volumes which he published in the years immediately following the end of the First World War : *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), *Michael Robartes and The Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), and *The Winding Stair* (1933). In these years he was reading widely the philosophers, Plato Plotinus, Vico, Hegel, Croce and Whitehead, and he was particularly impressed by the idealism of George Berkeley, the Irish eighteeth-century bishop, 'God-appointed Berkeley who proved all things a dream.' From about 1920 onwards, he was working out the curious and elaborate system of occult thought which he expounded in the prose work called *A Vision* (1925). The lady, whom he had married in 1916, was his medium and with her he had conducted various experiments in spiritualism. He could not be content with the illogical dualism of the average modern man who accepts scientific naturalism with one part of his mind and belief in a divinely revealed religion with the other. On the other hand, he could not accept the traditional Christian theology. As he himself wrote, he had an essentially religious mind ; his mind was also orderly and logical. So, like William Blake, he constructed a system of belief out of his own private experiences. This is the system of *A Vision*, a doctrine of reincarnation, according to which all the types of humanity are arranged in a cycle or 'Great Wheel' consisting of twenty-eight phases corresponding to the phases of the moon. Every soul has to pass through these twenty-eight phases and history is simply a cyclic repetition of the phases of the Great Wheel. The system is further complicated by the division of each soul into four 'faculties'—'will', 'mask', 'creative mind' and 'body of fate'. It is strange to find Yeats elaborating this fanciful yet inhuman and abstract system of determinism accompanied by various romantic mystifications at the very time when his personality was acquiring an unrivalled richness and power through a new vital contact with humanity and the contemporary world. He himself was fond of quoting Goethe's saying that 'a poet cannot have too much philosophy, but he ought to keep it out of his poetry.' Yeats did not keep the philosophy of *A Vision* out of all his later poems, but those in which he used it directly, such as, *Ego Dominus Tuus*, *The Phases of the Moon* and *The Double Vision of Michael Robartes*, in spite of notable passages, are artistic failures. The 'philosophy' seems to have been chiefly valuable not as the material for poetry but as a kind of map of the inner life, a spiritual framework like that which Catholicism provided for Hopkins. The power and intensity of the best poems in his later volumes was certainly due to a synthesis of a realistic and humorous view of life with the strengthened visionary power arising from his occult and adventures. Soon after the first version of *A Vision* was published, he wrote of it as something which he had to get out of his system before the poetry he wanted to write would be possible : 'I have not dealt with the whole of my subject, but I am longing to put it out of my reach that I may write the poetry it seems to have made possible. I can now, if I have the energy, find the simplicity I have sought in vain. I need no longer write poems like 'The Phases of the Moon......Nor spend years.. ...striving with abstraction'. *A Vision* did not provide a new mythology for Yeats's later poetry but it provided a background which illuminates the dynamic myths of his maturity with a visionary radiance."

With his marriage in 1917, 'the foolish noise of his youth' was over. The country had also gone through a great upheaval. The Great War had taken away many a brave man. 'All these happenings brought to the poet a new sense of life. Friends had passed away ; an age was over ; and with time, things could be seen in a different perspective. *The Wild Swans* gives us a view of what these historic events meant to a seer who aimed at seeing things not only in the aesthetic, but also in a metaphysical light. Coole was Lady Gregory's country-seat where Yeats had found not only peace but also pleasure during depressed periods of his life. He was now to give it his tribute of poetic commemoration, called out by the tragic death of Lady Gregory's son in the Great War. Sorrow for the dead has called the tune. The death of Major Gregory has provided the focal point from which to remember the friends of his youth now dead and gone. What he had long been cogitating about life and death, his 'perms' and 'gyres' became the warf and the woof through which he could represent the destinies of the dead. The opening poem from which the volume took its title, gives us a lovely picture of nine-and-fifty swans padding in the 'cold companionable streams—types of people going through the stream of life. Spenser and Shelley had both used swans as a symbol of happy human life. Yeats worked into it the plangent strain of melancholy meditation.'—(B. P. Misra).

Some of the major poems of the collection, *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), are : '*The Wild Swans at Coole*, '*In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*', *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*', '*Lines Written in Dejection*', '*The Dawn*', '*On Woman*', '*The Fisherman*', '*Memory*', '*His Phoenix*', '*Upon a Dying Lady*', '*The Scholar*', etc. The poems incorporated in *The Wild Swans* are personal. "The design of the book, therefore, is Death, Life, and the Patterns of Life and Death. Yeats's marks are Survivor, Defeated Lover, and Scholar. The progression is from uncomplicated personal statement to an elaborate presentation of the intricate image on which *Vision* is founded " The title of the poem is symbolic and throws light on important themes. The swans create the illusion of immortality and link the earth with the sky in their flight. They represent mortality as well as eternity.

The Wild Swans, therefore, marks a change from unrest to rest, from storm to tranquillity, from free play of emotions to restraint :

> "The trees are in their autumn beauty
> The woodland paths are dry.
> Under the October twilight, the water
> Mirrors a little sky ;
> Upon the brimming water, among the stone,
> Are nine and fifty swans."

Swans occur again and again. First, they stand for life-force ; their hearts do not grow old and their vigour is such that they climb the air instead of flying through it. Secondly, they stand for the union of the time with the timeless, of the finite with the infinite, of the individual soul with the universal supreme soul. Thirdly, they symbolize inspiration, and also imagination. Fourthly, they represent exulting in passionate experience, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Fifthly, they stand for the solitary soul performing its lonely journey through life. But it is not a different swan standing for a different idea each time, nor a code-word for a fixed idea. It is the same swan acting in different ways, much like a living bird ; there is a cluster of thoughts which affect each other, and now one, now another, is in front.

Nonetheless, *The Wild Swans* embodies some of Yeats's nicest and finest poetry of reminiscence, frequently structured in long irregular versified paragraphs, which the poet tackles very skilfully—he draws more and more on family traditions and memories in an effort to connect his past with his present through a common tradition that links him with his forefathers. The most magnificent of this poetry of reminiscence is the poem entitled *In Memory of Robert Gregory*, which has been assessed as the most genuinely commemorative of all the great English elegies. Another remarkable feature of this collection is its acute unconcern with a Great War which was one of the most burning themes with the contemporary English poets. Some of the poems in this collection are love poems ; in the group of poems addressed to Maud Gonne, the poet is still young of heart.

According to Prof. B. Rajan, "*The Wild Swans at Coole* begins with the muted melancholy of the title poem and ends with the bleak ambivalences of *The Double Vision of Michael Robartes*. Between the sense of withering away and its growing knowledge of the truth, the collection stands judiciously balanced. It moves through the death of friends and the persistence of love to a harsher world which the light of the 'Vision' dominates." Prof. Rajan further observes, "*The Wild Swans at Coole* marks the kinds of decisive movement forward in Yeats's development that can only be predicted after it has been achieved. In *Responsibilities*, it seems that Yeats's spectacular technical powers are applied to the poetic experience rather than made to grow out of it. Indignation with the Paudeens never attains the status it achieves in *The Fisherman*, where metrics and emotions are startingly and indissolubly folded. The self-contempt of the earlier collection, except when it is disciplined by irony, is capable of approaching self-indulgence. The attitudes are designed to shock the reader into attention and do so with almost uniform success ; but the tactics, however, confidently carried out, are impressive primarily as tactics which are not absorbed into the thinking of the body. In *The Wild Swans*, the civilized sadness of the Gregory Elegy, the taut, full-shaped beauty of the love lyrics and the title of the poem itself, completely possessed and formed by its central symbol, bring us into a world where ordinary speech is invested with fundamental meaning and the objects of an everyday world seem charged with forces beyond them that find their expression in them. The reader can only be amused by Middleton Murry's conclusion that *The Wild Swans at Coole* 'is indeed a swan song. It is eloquent of final defeat ; the following of a lonely path has ended in the poet's sinking exhausted in a wildernss of grey.' The comment should do more than remind us that critics are not always reliable judges of poetry : there are also ironical and salutary occasions when it is the poems that pass judgment on the critics."

Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921) is a short collection which contains three very remarkable and memorable poems of Yeats ; *Easter* (*1916*), *The Second Coming*, and *A Prayer for My Daughter*. In this collection, the poet can be seen in a newer light. The events of the war years in Ireland dominate it. The heroes of the Easter Rebellion (1916), in themselves, ordinary, and one of them 'a lout', had suddenly by one consecrated act, become transformed. Yeats praised them in his poem *Easter 1916*. The change in his attitude can well be guessed from the lines like the following—

"Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned."

—*The Second Coming*

The poem also illustrates the myth-making habit of the poet. His mythopoeic imagination transforms and modifies old myths to suit his purpose as well as makes new myths. He writes in the opening lines of the poem :

"I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter of desk among grey
Eighteenth century houses."

The impression created is that of some legendary or mythological figures coming out of the dead past and taking part in the activity of the present.

The Tower and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* include the best of Yeats's poems. The Poems like the following, present Yeats as one of the greatest poets of English.

1. *Sailing to Byzantium.*
2. *The Tower.*
3. *Meditation in Time of Civil War.*
4. *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.*
5. *Leda and the Swan.*
6. *Among School Children.*
7. *A Dialogue of Self and Soul.*

They are remarkable for clarity of conviction and mastery of technique. He writes with perfect ease and lucidity. He started using Blake's system of contraries. In his *Sailing to Byzantium,* which opens *The Tower* group of poems, the great contraries of youth and age, life and death, change and the changeless, and nature and art are brought together. In *The Tower* itself, we get the antithesis between the physical decay in old age, and the mature mind "excited, passionate, fantastical". In *Leda and the Swan,* we come across a fusion of the actual and the non-actual, the reality and the legendary, of history and vision.

Dr Rajan writes, "With *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair,* Yeats's writing comes fully into its strength and words respond completely to the poem's call to order. To say that Yeats was incapable of writing a bad poem during this phase is an exaggeration, but one within the limits of critical licence. His best poems have the quality of greatness ; they reward and yet defeat analysis, remaining obstinately superior to the sum of everything that can be said about them Nevertheless, though the content of greatness remains permanently elusive, the style of greatness invites critical definition ; the suggestion made here is that Yeats's poetry achieves the self-conquest which he himself called style by a sensitive engaging of extremities, in which commitment to either extremity is avoided and the poem grows out of the creative tension between them. His poetry succeeds, in other words, because it is securely the poetry of the main stream."

The 'Tower' and the 'Winding Stair' are the key-symbols round which are organized a cluster of images. The tower symbolizes solicitude, asceticism, night, and solitary intellect. The winding stair symbolizes aspiration ascending up to heaven. It also symbolizes the movements of the philosophical "gyres". Attached to these symbols are many of the private associations and highly evocative images. In this way, the poems gain in richness and complexity of texture. There is in these poems a vein of coarseness and arrogance, of bitterness, despair and pessimism. The poet has been brooding long and deep over violence and bloodshed both in Ireland and in the world at large, and his thoughts are consequently gloomy and despairing. Another reason was the irritation caused by his own ill health. In the third section of *The Tower* (1927), however, the poet declares :

> "Now shall I make my soul,
> Compelling it to study
> In a learned school......"

And in *A Dialogue of Self and Soul* (1929), he utters :

> "......Endure that toil of growing up ;
> The ignominy of boyhood ; the distress
> Of boyhood changing into man ;
> The unfinished man and his pain
> Brought face to face with his own clumsiness ;
> The finished man among his enemies..."

Assume the pain of growth, carry it through the detail of experience, and we get this concentrated statement : "endure......toil......ignominy ......distress......pain .... clumsiness......enemies." And again in *Sailing to Byzantium* (1927) didn't he say ?—

> "That is no country for old men. The young
> In one another's arms, birds in the trees—
> Those dying generations—at their song,
> The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
> Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
> Whatever is begotten, born, or died."

The poems of *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* are stiff and intellectual ; but most of those grouped under the heading *Words for Music Perhaps* and *A Woman Young and Old* are marked by simplicity and straightforwardness. In these poems, Crazy Jane lusty and coarse ; Jack, the journeyman ; and Tom, the lunatic, figure everywhere. Yeats has been assailed as being coarse and sexual in these poems. Undoubtedly, there is occasionally a frank and open discussion of sexuality, showing that the poet has not forgotten his youth and the excitement of living. In the poems *The Pairing* and *A Last Confession* there is overt exultation of sexuality which can come only from "a foolish, passionate old man," and he asks, "Why should not old men be mad ?—

> "How can I, that girl standing there,
> My attention fix.
> ... ...
> ... ...
> O, that I were young again
> And held her to my arms !"

These lines occur in the poem, *Politics*. The Crazy-Jane poems, thus, are full of coarse revelling with sex. But at the same time, Yeats has put his profoundest philosophy in the mouth of Crazy Jane and Lunatic Tom. The philosophy is that wholeness is the union of opposites, a union which according to Crazy Jane is achieved in the act of love. Fair and foul are near of kin, flesh and spirit demand each other, and "nothing can be sole or whole that has not been rent."

Chief Characteristics of Yeats's Later Poetry

It follows from the above discussion that Yeats's later period (1919-33) is rich, complex, intricate, mature and intellectualized. His style reached maturity at the same time as his life. He began to draw images from divergent sources and different layers of experience. The major symbols and images are evocative and functional A tower is always high, and a winding stair intricate and complex. These symbols in a way symbolize the chief characteristics of his poetry of this period. Now and then images come in battalions ; there is a whole procession of them, *e g.*, in *The Prayer for My Daughter*, the Helen image evokes the image of Aphrodite who "rose out of the spray" and chose "a bandy-legged smith for man." This improper union simultaneously suggests Maud Gonne's marriage with MacBride, and thus brings together present and personal with the past and impersonal. In *Leda and the Swan*, the union of the Swan and Leda symbolizes the union of the spiritual and the physical, of the human and the superhuman, of the god Zeus and a woman, of the mortal and the immortal. The reference to "burning roof and tower" puts one in mind of Helen and the destruction of Troy, which in its turn suggests the destructive beauty of Maud Gonne.

So at this stage Yeats's poetry, though may not be obscure, yet is certainly complex and wise, deep and thoughtful. It is also remarkable for expansion and compression. It is agile and marked with a note of bitterness and pessimism, but this gloom is not a child's or adolescent's immature delight, but an expression of and a realization of the crudities and realities of life. It incorporates Blake's doctrine of contraries Such opposites as youth and age, spirit and flesh, knowledge and power, the past and the present, creation and destruction, change and immobility, progress and fixity, etc., are yoked together. Such contradictions, says David Daiches, are not only rendered but also reconciled.

Whereas some poems of this period indulge in deep metaphysics and philosophy, there are others which may be called sexy poems. But through sex the poet expresses a simple philosophy. His major themes during this phase are, (1) preoccupation with age and the decay of youth and beauty, and (2) the crisis of the present civilization seen as part of the cyclic process of history. To Prof. Stock his later poetry is "a wrestling match between the soul in eternity and the soul in time, or the self or the heart as he variously calls it." Nevertheless, the poetry of this period is a mixed bag of myth, history, politics, art, philosophy, friendship, love, etc. Some other poems, however, are remarkable for their note of calm serenity followed by poignant intensity. These later poems also display Yeats's mythopoetic imagination. No modern poet, says Prof. A. G. Stock, "has so much of the ancient mythopoetic gift as Yeats." He creates new myths out of the lives of the people he knows.

During this period words obey the poet's call and he uses them like a master with perfect ease and self-confidence to express swift transition in thought, often highly abstract thought. Words belonging to different levels are brought together and absorbed. For example, in *The Tower*, he assimilates such colloquialism as "lock, stock and barrel," and uses expressions like a "dog's tail" to convey his unhappiness at his loss of youth. Such a sudden descent, according to Prof. Stock, is "a dramatic use of language, which delivers judgment by changing in the perspective."

Yeats's poetry of this later period is also remarkable for the austerity of diction. His language has lost the Pre-Raphaelite decorativeness of the early phase. It has become more trenchant and adaptable to divergent kind of ideas and experiences. The diction is rather cold, bare, hard, clear-cut and oblique. He takes pains ; and the poetry of this period, therefore, becomes markedly weighty and deep The style has been stripped and intensified. He is ahead towards, what he himself wrote to Prof. Grierson, a "natural syntax". "Yeats's later work always has the authentic ring of speech although he writes in metre."—(Stock).

Yeats's later poetry also shows his skilful mastery of most varied stanza-forms. From the metrical point of view, Yeats is in the English tradition. To a great extent, the credit of freeing the English lyric from the tyranny of the Iambic must go to Yeats. He mastered traditional stanza-patterns of the kind that Chaucer handed down to English poetry through Spenser and the romantics and no poet of any time "has written stanzas at once so rich in music and so compact in thought and phrase" His lyrics "sing and chant themselves from sheer rightness of sound." At this time the octosyllabic line is much in favour with Yeats. According to David Daiches, Yeats in this period handles rhythms more freely with a growing sense of originality and variety in stanza-forms. He makes increasing use of a technique so commonly used by Donne : the thought moulds the pattern in the first stanza, and this stanza-pattern becomes the model for the succeeding stanzas.

10. THE LAST PHASE OF YEATS'S POETRY

[*1935—1939*]

With the third phase of his poetry, Yeats had reached maturity : he had attained wisdom. His last poems—*The Full Moon in March* (1935) and *Last Poems and Plays* (1936-1939), published posthumously)—confirm the impression that the artistic synthesis achieved in Byzantium was not the final one in the development of Yeats. In *The Full Moon in March*, he declared : "I may seem, though I die old a foolish, passionate man." He was growing old. He was above want, and had achieved fame and recognition. His letters to Olivia Shakespeare at this time again and again show that he feared that, "knowing all," he would "grow to nothing," that understanding of life and its problems would make him incapable of passionate experience, of that passionate excitement which is the source of all poetry. Since all his questioning was at rest, he would grow more and more serene and satisfied, and thus his poetic vein would dry up. That is why we find him repeatedly praying for 'passion', for 'folly', the sources of poetic inspiration :

> "O ! what I am, that I should not seem,
> For the song's sake a fool ?"

And in *A Prayer for Old Age*, he exclaims :

> "I pray
> ... ...
> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate old man."

So most of the poems of this period are the poems of lust and rage. The Steinach operation in 1934 was followed by bursts of energy, sexual, political, and he challenged his various illnesses by his own revolt against "passive suffering". Yeats had no desire to be taken for quiet-voiced elder and his last period had little of the gracious serenity or autumnal calm which is attributed to poets who have reached the heights. "Indignations," he told Dorothy Wellesley, "is a kind of joy.. ....We that are joyous need not be afraid to denounce." He took a great deal of pleasure in denouncing, raging, and in unkindly exercising the power over other poets which his fame made possible. He thought much about politics and the state of civilization and wrote *On the Boiler* (1938) not in a mood of reminiscence but in order to give Ireland his advice about such matters as public education and the army.

"The stress on sexuality, the taste for politics, the interest in civilization, the discovery of the new poets of the nineteen-thirties—all these various fragmentary energies, which belong to an inflowing tide, seem at first to contrast with the feeling that this period is nonethe-less a final period in no merely chronological sense : that Yeats's poetic mind was on the last thing, and that he was perfecting a design and resolving his experience into a last recognizable gesture."—(Peter Ure).

As mentioned by F. R. Higgins, there are two strains running side by side in the poetry of the last phase : One, simple, bucolic, Rabelaisian : and the other, intellectual, exotic or visionary. Sometimes it is the same poem that two strains meet. G. M. Bowra, Stephen Spender, and D. S. Savage notice in *The Last Poems* a decline in Yeats's poetic powers. Bowra finds in them a simplicity both in tone end texture, and adds that there is not in them "even the stern, majestic utterance of his mature work." In the opinion of D. S. Savage, in these poems "we have the glorification of violence and war, the celebration of sexuality, the same inner emptiness revealed either in an expression of a sense of personal futility or in the insistence upon a hysterical and nihilistic exultation." But the poems like *Lapis-Lazuli*, *The Municipal Gallery Revisited*, *The Status*, and *A Bronze Head* are in themselves a sufficient refutation of D. S. Savage's criticism.

None-the-less, "the poems are often reckless and excited, their style flouts many conventions of diction and metre, and tumbles about, exalted and gawky and violent, they often thrust out into a march or into a crackle of jokes ; the "sixty years old smiling public man," with his comfortable irony, has become a "wild old wicked man", the whiffler who stalks about in front of the circus-parade."—(Peter Ure).

Thus, the major themes of this period are lust and rage, the aesthetic ascent of the lapis-lazuli mountain, the visionary reading of history under the system's bleakly joyous light, the passionate recollection of friends and old companions, and the sombre fitness of a dying life as a candle with which to survey a dying culture.

"Behind all is the mockery of the abyss. Plato's ghost sings 'what then ?' in accents of mounting derision. The ruined house lights up but only in the night : in the morning there is crumbled and roofless reality. Nothing is left for those who have reached the time for dying to say. The circus animals desert man in the refuse mound of the heart. He perfects what he can and achieves into the night : 'Lie down and die is echo's unyielding response to the torment of questioning. The mind moves upon silence like a long-legged fly on a stream. If the dawn breaks it is only to reveal that all but extinguished candle of life."—(B. Rajan).

The tone of these 'rich, dark' poems is tragic, even their gaiety is not merely ironical ; it is the reverse, the other side of the tragic. Tragic tone arises from three causes : the poet's awareness of increasing age, of the vanishing of Youth and Beauty as a result of the revages of Time, his consciousness of social reality and the catastrophe that threatens the world, and from a feeling that his friends are no more and the past order and tradition have vanished. It is as if the poet sitting somewhere at a vantage point outside time or on the "hill of the Muses", surveys the human civilization, penetrates deep into the social, political and historical forces and realizes the contradictions inherent in the human scene. He sees "blood and mire" all round, but finds consolation in his philosophy of the revolution of the gyres or the cyclic process of history.

"All things fall apart,
And are built again,
All those that build them
Again are gay."

So the tone is not that of despair or pessimism but of 'stoic defiance'. In the verses included in the volume *A Full Moon in March*, his anger rages over things, natural and supernatural and much of it is set to swinging, irresponsible tunes, suggesting not so much anger as a delighted realization that he could still be angry—(Stock). This makes *Parnell's Funeral* one of the bitterest poems of Yeats. The era of the legendary heroes of old has come to an end, and is being replaced by the chaos of dark passions.

The last poems written in the last four years of his career show a return to former vigour and zest for life, a greater range, and a greater "intensity of feeling and variety of style than any book he had written yet." Although he could not repeat his past experiences, yet his mind was richly stored with memories, the past was still alive in his mind, and these memories, both personal and impersonal, fire many a fine piece in *The Last Poems*. *The Municipal Gallery Revisited* is the finest of those poems of reminiscence. Memories of the past cluster round him, memories which are in his very blood, and which revive past dreams, past ideas and past conflicts. His nostalgia for a vanished past imparts a tragic atmosphere to the whole poem. Although these memories are personal, yet they acquire a general and universal significance.

The years (1836-1939), before the Second World War, were the years of growing realization that another was in the offing and war hysteria and the fear of air-raids kept on mounting. So the atmosphere was tense and full of fears, frustrations and apprehensions. Yeats also broods over the impending crisis. In *The Gyres* he foresees the end of civilization. In *The Old Rocky Face*, the poet links up the present with three thousand years of history, and sees physical and moral downfall :

"What matter though numb nightmare rides on top,
And blood and mire the sensitive body stain."

And further,

"Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul."

In his earlier poems, he had escaped from the present into a fairyland, now his philosophy itself becomes a sort of fairyland. Prof. Stock and Louis Macneice are of the opinion that there is certain hardness in the last poems : 'the spirit of Yeats's poetry', says Stock, is not compassionate.

In this phase also the poet tries to reconcile the opposites. Plotinus's influence is quite strong. In his poem on sexual passion also, there is a similar fusion of the opposites like the natural and the spiritual, for example, in *The Wild Old Wicked Man* and *The Three Bushes*.

These last poems are more difficult than many other poems of the earlier phases. Superfluity is discarded. Not only Buddha is brought in to create an eastern atmosphere, and the cat Grimalkin brings with it suggestions of medieval magic and witchcraft. So obscurity is increased by the peculiar nature of Yeats's philosophy which is a combination of medieval magic and oriental mysticism. "The words move with ease, the images are living and natural, the abstraction vanishes into them so completely that one wonders how it had ever seemed obscure, and yet in gaining clarity it loses nothing of its depth."—(Stock). His thoughts turn again and again to the supernatural, and everything he touches is a lens through which to focus the super-natural, although he draws images and symbols from legend, history, everyday common life. As Fraser points out, "Yeats's poetry matures, one of the things that happens is not so much that it becomes more 'personal', less of a 'mark', as that he gets more of his personality into it. He gets in things like irony, humour, arrogant irascibility; the coaxing manners of the professional Irish conversationalist, which in 1890's he would probably have considered 'anti-poetic', he gets in more of the prosaic detail of life, transformed by a poetic apprehension of it." Yeats has realized Aristotle's ideal—"To write well, express, yourself like the common people, but think like a wise man."

11. YEATS'S VIEWS ON HIS POETRY

I

"A General Introduction for My Work"[1]

Yeats himself writes :

A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria. Dante and Milton had mythologies, Shakespeare the characters of English history or of traditional romance; even when the poet seems most himself, when he is Raleigh and gives potentates the lie, or Shelley 'a nerve o'er which do creep the else unfelt oppressions of this earth,' or Byron when 'the soul wears out the breast' as 'the sword outwears its sheath', he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something indeed complete. A novelist might describe his incoherence, he must not; he is more type than man, more passion than type. He is Lear, Romeo, Oedipus, Tiresias; he has stepped out of a play, and even the woman he loves is Rosalind, Cleopatra, never The Dark Lady. He is part of his own phantasmagoria and we adore him because nature has grown intelligible, and by so doing a part of our creative power. "When mind is lost in the light of Self", says the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, "those that are alive and those that are dead and gets what the world cannot give." The world knows nothing because it has made nothing, we know everything because we have made everything.

It was through the old Fenian Leader, Jown O'Leary, I found my theme. His long imprisonment, his longer banishment, his

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[1] From *Essays and Introduction* by W. B. Yeats.

magnificent had, his scholar, his pride, his integrity, all that aristocratic dream nourished amid little shops and little farms, had drawn around him a group of young men ; I was but eighteen or nineteen and already, under the influence of *The Faerie Queene* and *The Sad Shepherd*, written a pastoral play, and under that of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, two plays, one staged somewhere in the Caucasus, the other in a crater of the moon ; and I knew myself to be vague and incoherent. He gave me the poems of Thomas. Davis said they were not good poetry but had changed his life when a young man spoke of other poems associated with Davies and *The Nation* newspaper, probably lent me their books. I saw even more clearly than O'Leary that they were not separated individual men ; they spoke or tried to speak out of a people to a people ; behind them stretched the generations. I knew, though from the modern literature, Jonathan Swift compared to a web a spider draws out of its bowels ; I hated and still hate with an ever-growing hatred the literature of the point of view. I wanted, if my ignorance permitted, to get back to Homer, to those that fed at his table. I wanted to cry as all men cried, to laugh as all men laughed, and the young Ireland poets when not writing more politics had the same want, but they did not know that the common and its befitting language is the research of lifetime and when found may lack popular recognition. Then somebody, not O'Leary, told me of Standish O'Grandy and his interpretation of Irish legends. O'Leary had sent me to O'Curry, but his unarranged and uninterpreted history defeated my boyish indolence.

......When modern Irish literature began, O'Grandy's influence predominated. He could delight us with an extravagance, we were too critical to share ; a day will come, he said, Sliavenamon will be more famous than Olympus, yet he was no nationalist as we understood the word, but in rebellion, as he was fond of explaining, against the House of Commons not against the King.

Our mythology, our legends, differ from those of other European countries because down to the end of the seventeenth century they had the attention, perhaps the unquestioned belief, of peasant and noble alike ; Homer belongs to sedentary men, even today our ancient queens, our medieval soldiers and lovers, can make a pedlar shudder. I can put my own thought, despair perhaps, from the study of present circumstance in the light of ancient philosophy, into the mouth of rambling poets of the seventeenth century, or even of some imagined ballad-singer of today, and the deeper my thought, the more credible, the more peasant-like, are ballad-singer and rambling poet. Some modern poets contend that Jazz and music-hall songs are the folk art of our time, that we should mould our art upon them ; we, Irish poets, modern men also, reject every folk art that does not go back to Olympus. Give me time and a little youth and I will prove that even 'Johnny, I hardly knew Ye', goes back.

......If Irish literature goes on as my generation planned it, it may do something to keep the 'Irishry' living, nor will the work of the realists hinder, nor the figures they imagine, nor those described in memories of the revolution. These last especially, like certain great political predecessors Parnell, Swift, Lord Edward have stepped back into the tapestry. It may be, indeed, that certain characteristics of the 'Irishry' must grow in importance. When Lady Gregory asked me to annotate her *Visions and Beliefs*, I began, that I might understand what she had taken down in Galway, and investigation of contemporary spiritualism. For several years I frequented those mediums who in various poor parts of London instruct artisans or their wives for a few pence upon their relations to their dead, to their employees, and to their children ; then I compared what she had published, with Indian belief......I am convinced that in two or three generations it will become generally known that the mechanical theory has no reality, that the natural and supernatural are knit together, that to escape a dangerous fanaticism we must study a new science ; at that moment Europeans may find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism, not shut off in a dead history, but flowing concrete, phenomenal.

I was born into this faith, lived in it, and shall die in it ; my Christ, a legitimate dedication from the creed of St. Patrick as I think, is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake's 'Imagination', what the *Upanishads* have named 'Self' ; nor is this unity distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but imminent, differing from man to man and age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, 'eye of newt, and toe of frog'.

Subconscious preoccupation with this theme brought me *A Vision*, its harsh geometry an incomplete interpretation. The 'Irishry' have preserved their ancient 'deposit' through wars which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, become wars of extermination ; no people Lecky said at the opening of his *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, have undergone greater persecution, nor did that persecution altogether cease up to our own day. No people hate as we do whom that past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression. It is not enough to have put it into the mouth of a rambling peasant poet. Then I remind myself that though mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English, and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak, and write, that everything I love has come to me through English ; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. I am like the Tibetan monk who dreams at his initiation that he is the eaten and the eater. This is Irish hatred and solitude, the hatred of human life that made Swift write *Gulliver* and the epitaph upon his grave that can still make us wag between extremes and doubt our sanity.

Again and again I am asked why I do not write in Gaelic. Some four or five years ago I was invited to dinner by a London Society and found myself among London journalists, Indian students and foreign political refugees. An Indian paper says it was a dinner in my honour ; I hope not : I have forgotten, though I have a clear memory of my own angry mind. I should have spoken as men are expected to speak at public dinners ; I should have paid and been paid conventional compliments ; then they would speak of the refugees ; from that on all would be lively and topical, foreign tyranny would be arranged, England seems even to those confused Indians the protector of liberty ; I grew angrier ; Wordsworth, that typical Englishman, had published his famous sonnet to Francois Dominique Toussaint, Sant a Domingo Negro :

> "There's not a breathing of the common mind
> That will forget thee."

In the year when Emmet conspired and died, and he remembered that rebellion as little as the half hanging and the pitch cap that preceded it by half a dozen years. That there might be no topical speeches I denounced the oppression of the people of India ; being a man of letters, not a politician, I told how they had been forced to learn everything, even their own Sanskrit, through the vehicle of English till the first discoverer of wisdom had become bywords for vague abstract facility. I begged the Indian writers present to remember that no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother-tongue. I turned a friendly audience hostile, yet, when I think of that scene I am unrepentant and angry.

I could no more have written Gaelic than those Indians write in English ; Gaelic is my national language, but it is not my mother-tongue.

Style is almost unconscious. I know what I have tried to do, little what I have done. Contemporary lyric poems, even those that moved me—The Stream's Secret, Dolores seemed too long, put an Irish preference for a swift current might be more indolence, yet Burns may have felt the same when he read Thomson and Cowper. The English mind is meditative, rich, deliberate ; it may remember the Thames valley. I planned to write short lyrics or poetic dramas where every speech would be short and concentrated, knit by dramatic tension, and I did so with more confidence, because young English poets were at that time writing out of emotion at the moment of crisis, though their old show-moving meditation returned almost at once. Then, and in this English poetry has followed my lead, I tried to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate, normal speech. I wanted to write in whatever language comes most naturally when we soliloquise, as I do all day long, upon the events of our own lives or of any life we can see ourselves for the moment. I sometimes compare myself with the mad old slum women I hear denouncing and remembering : 'How dare you', I heard one say of some imaginary suitor, 'and you without health or a home.' If I spoke my thoughts aloud they might be as angry and as wild. It was a long time I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and subject-matter I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language. Ezra Pound, Turner, Lawrence wrote admirable free verse, I could not, I would love myself, become joyless like those mad old women. The translators still bothered about rhythm, created a form midway between prose and verse that seems natural to impersonal meditation ; but all that is personal soon rots ; it must be packed in ice or salt. Once when I was in delirium from pneumonia, I dictated a letter to George Moore telling him to eat salt because it was a symbol of eternity ; the delirium passed, I had no memory of that letter, but I must have meant what I now mean. If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its accidence, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even what, I after must seem traditional. I commit my emotion to shepherds, herdsmen, camel-drivers, learned men, Milton's or Shelley's Platonist, that tower Palmer drew. Talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage. I am a crowd, I am a lonely man, I am nothing. Ancient salt is best packing. The heroes of Shakespeare convey to us through their looks, or through the metaphorical patterns of their speech, the sudden enlargement of their vision, their ecstasy at the approach of death ; 'She should have died hereafter' ; 'Of many thousand kisses, the poor last', 'Absent thee from felicity awhile'. They have become God or Mother Goddess, the pelican, 'My baby at my breast', but all must be cold ; no actress have ever sobbed when she played Cleopatra, even the shallow brain of a producer has never thought of such a thing. The supernatural is present, cold winds blow across our hands, upon our faces, the thermometer falls, and because of that cold we are hated by journalists and groundlings. There may be in this or that detail painful tragedy but in the whole work none. I have heard Lady Gregory say, rejecting some play in the modern manner sent to the Abbey Theatre, 'Tragedy must be a joy to the man who dies.' Nor is it any different with lyrics, songs, narrative poems ; neither scholars nor the populace have sung or read anything generation after generation because of its pain. The maid of honour who seems tragedy they sing must be lifted out of history with timeless pattern, she is one of the four Maries, the rhythm is old and familiar, imagination must dance, must be carried beyond feeling into the aboriginal ice. Is ice the correct word ? I once boasted, copying the phrase from a letter of my father's, that I would write a poem 'cold and passionate as the dawn'.

When I wrote in blank verse I was dissatisfied ; my vaguely mediaeval *Countess Cathleen* fitted the measure, but our Heroic Age went better, or so I fancied, in the ballad metre of *The Green Helmet*. There was something in what I felt about Deirdre, about Cuchulain, that rejected the Renaissance and its characteristic metres, and this was the principal reason why I created in dance plays the form that vary blank verse with lyric metres. When I speak of blank verse and analyse my feelings, I stand at a moment of history when instinct, its traditional songs and dances, its general agreement, is of the past. I have been cast up out of the whale's belly though I still remember the sound and sway that came from beyond its ribs, and, like the Queen in Paul Fort's ballad, I smell of the fish of the sea. The contrapuntal structure of the verse, to employ a term adapted to Robert Bridges, combines the past and the present. If I repeat the first line of *Paradise Lost* so as to emphasize its five feet I am among the folk singers—'Of man's first disobedience and the fruit', but speak it as I should I cross it with another emphasis, that of passionate prose— Of man's first disobedience and the fruit', 'Of........ what moves me and my hearer is a vivid speech that has no laws except that it must not exercise the ghostly voice.' I am awake and asleep at my movement of revelation, self-possessed in self-surrender there is no rhyme, no reach of the beaten drum, the dancing foot, that would overset my balance. When I was a boy I wrote a poem upon dancing that had one good line : 'They snatch with their hands at the sleep of the skies.' If I sat down and thought for a year I would discover that but for certain syllabic limitations, a rejection or acceptance of certain elisions, I must wake or sleep.

The Countess Cathleen could speak a blank verse which I had loosened, almost put out of joint, for her need, because I thought of her as medieval and thereby connected her with general European movement. For Deirdre and Cuchulain and all the other figures of Irish legend are still in the whale's belly.

The young English poets reject dream and personal emotion ; they have thought out opinions that join them to this or that political party ; they employ an intricate psychology, action in character, not as the ballade character in action, and all consider that they have a right to the same close attention that men pay to the mathematician and the metaphysician. One of the more distinguished had just explained that man has hitherto slept but must now awake. They are determined to express the factory, the metropolis, that they may be modern. Young men teaching school in some picturesque cathedral town, or settled for life in Capri or Sicily, defend their type of metaphor by saying that it comes naturally to a man who travels to his work by Tube. I am indebted to a man of this school who went through my work at my request, crossing out all conventional metaphors, but they seem to me to have rejected also those dream associations which were the whole art of Mallarme. He had topped a previous wave. As they express not what the *Upanishads* call "that ancient self" but individual intellect, they have the right to choose the man in the Tube because of his objective importance. They attempt to kill the whale, push the Ranaissance higher yet, out-think Leonardo ; their verse kills the folk ghost and yet would remain verse.

I am joined to the 'Irishry' and I expect a counter-Renaissance ; I make no complaint ; I am accustomed to the geometrical arrangement of history in *A Vision*, but I go deeper than 'custom' for my convictions. When I stand upon O'Connell Bridge in the half-light and notice that discordant architecture, all those electric signs, where modern heterogeneity has taken physical form, a vague hatred comes up out of my own dark and I am certain that wherever in Europe there are minds strong enough to lead others the same vague hatred will have issued in violence and imposed some kind of rule of kindred. I cannot know the nature of that rule, for its opposite fills light ; all I can do to bring it nearer is to intensify my hatred. I am no Nationalist, except in Ireland for passing reasons ; State and Nation are the work of intellect, and when you consider what comes before and after them they are, as Victor Hugo said, of something or other, not worth the blade of grass God gives for the most of the linnet.

(In his Diary he writes) : Why do I suppose that I may learn to keep to my own in every situation in life. To discover and create in myself as I grow old that thing which is to life what style is to letters —moral radiance, a personal quality of universal meaning in action and in thought. I can see now how I lost myself. I must have been trying to recreate in myself the passion I wrote. Yes, but for me they must flow from reason itself. My talent would fade if I trafficked in general standards and yet Punchinello is ancient. They dug up a statue of him among the ruins of Rome. Is not all life the struggle of existence, naked, unarmed, timid, but immortal, against generalized thought, only the personal history in this is the reverse of the world's history. We see all arts and societies passing from experience to generalization whereas the young begin with generalization and end with experience that is to say not what we call the results which are generalizations but with its presence, its energy. All good art is experience, all popular art generalization.

II

Yeats's Convictions as Expressed in His Writings

(1) It was my father who made me the artist I am, and kindled the sort of ambition I have transmitted to my sons. My wife, once meeting an old man who in his youth had associated much with my father, judged it a good opportunity to ask about him, and whether he was a good preacher. The answer came promptly : 'Yes, good— but flightly.'......My father was sweet-tempered and affectionate, also he constantly read Shelley, and, no less, Shelley's antidote, Charles Lamb. To be with him was to be caught up into a web of visionary hopefulness......he would talk of the men he had known—his fellow students—of Archer Butler, the Platonist and of a man called Gray who was, I think, an astronomer, and of his friend Isaac Butt, that man of genius engulfed in law and politics.

—W. B. Yeats, *Early Memories : Some Chapters of Autobiography*, p. 35.

(2) A man has a hope for heaven,
But soulless a fairy dies,
As a leaf that is old, and withered and cold
When the wintry vapours rise.

(3) I was arrogant, indolent, excitable.

(4) When I first went to London
I was looking for a technique
I had the folk behind me
My good was there to seek
But without the subtlety London taught
I could not learn to speak.

(5) ......Yet women filled me with curiosity and my mind seemed never to escape from the disturbance of my senses. I was a Romantic, my head full of the mysterious women of Rossetti, and those hesitating faces in the art of Burne Jones seemed always awaiting for some Alastor at the end of a long journey and I under the almost unendurable strain of my senses was convinced that I was without industry and without will......

(6) Yeats's first impressions about Maud Gonne, the woman he loved most : I had never thought to see in living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the bloom of apples and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty, because it changes least from youth to age, and stature so great that she seemed of a divine race.

(7) I had an unshakable conviction, arising how or whence, I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature and set before Irishmen for special manual and Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols.

(8) All things, apart from love and melancholy, were a study to us.

(9) Certainly, I had gone a great distance from my first poem, from all that I had copied from the folk art of Ireland..... and yet why am I so certain ?

(10) All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right.
Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shout ?

(11) Though leaves are many, the root is one ;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun ;
Now I may wither into truth.

(12) The poet finds and makes his mask in disappointment.

(13) All things can tempt me from this craft of verse :
One time it was a woman's face, or worse—
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land ;
Now nothing but comes readier to the hand
Than this accustomed toil.

(14) I think all happiness in life depends on having the energy to assume the mask of some other self ; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself—something created in a moment and perpetually renewed ; in playing a game like that of a child where one loses the infinite pain of self-realization, a grotesque or solemn painted face upon that one may haste from the terrors of judgment. An imaginative saturnalia that one may forget reality. Perhaps all the sins and energies of the world's flight from the infinite blinding beam. ......

(15) I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
Dragons and gods and moons
From heel to throat
And gave it to my song
And my song wore it ;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

—A Coat.

(16) I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul's.

(17) It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
Until imagination, ear and eye,
Can be content with argument and deal
In abstract things......

—The Tower.

(18) Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school.

(19) I—though heart might find relief
Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief

What seems most welcome in the tomb—play a predestined
part,
Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.

III

Yests's Theory of Poetry

From these abstracts and Yeats's General Intorduction to his own works entitled, *The First Principles*, we can draw out a theory of Yeats's poetry. In the beginning of his career, Yeats is found in full agreement with the views of his father that dramatic poetry was to be preferred because it is clear and sharp in outline, while the lyric is vague and blurred. So he wrote poetic plays with incoherent, rambling plots. However, his genius was lyrical and it penetrates even his dramas. Even of his early poetry, the bulk is that of the lyrical poetry. He believes in the theory of art for art's sake. He uses poetry to revive Irish legends, folk-lore, myths and tales of heroism, because he is conscious of the fact, as he himself says. "There can be no great nationality without literature." By his devotion and single-minded work, he "colours the awakening Irish literary movement with his own personality."

But in the 'nineties, under the impact of the French Symbolists and the English Aesthetes, he swings to the other extreme and devotes himself to the writing of "pure poetry". He still continues to believe that art should be for the sake of art After his involvement with politics and contemporary themes, he comes to the conclusion that poetry should devote itself exclusively to the pursuit of Beauty, and should have nothing to do with politics, religion, etc., and that there should even be no description of nature for the sake of nature. Poetry should express the "flow of sensations" in the poet's mind : it should convey the visions of truth that rise before his mind, and this can be done only through the use of symbols. Further, he writes in one of his essays that the arts should liberate themselves from, "their age, and from life, and be more free to lose themselves in beauty, and adds that poetry is not criticism of life, but the revelation of a hidden life." However, this phase of art for art's sake proved only a temporary one. He soon came to regard a body of poetry divorced from life as "sentimental" and "womanish", and expressed his dislike for a poetry which speaks with the sweet, "insinuating feminine voice of the dwellers in that country of shadows and hollow images." He regarded such a poetry as decadent, and was determined to fight against it.

In his later phase, while condemning the modern realists who mistake "the circumference with the people, on living, individual speech. He further advocates that the life of the present must be interwoven with the life of the past by the synthetic power of the poet's imagination. True poetry must be rooted both in the life of the past and the present. Literature must be "flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times, otherwise it is a mere chronicle."

Traditions of the past are a rich heritage for the modern poet, and works of art are always begotten by precious works of art." He realized that art is neither divorce from life and morality nor a mere imitation of reality. Poetry is made of experiences not only of the people of the present generation but also of the ancestors.

All great poetry is personal in the sense that all observation and experience, before they become fit subjects for poetry, must pass through the transforming process of the poet's imagination. An experience must fertilize the poet's imagination and become a part and parcel of his personality or in Yeats's words "must be felt in the marrow-bone", before really great poetry can be possible. So he says, "Literature is always personal, always one man's vision of the world, one man's experience." But, there must be a fusion of the impersonal with the personal, of the objective with the subjective before to create great poetry. Poetry, at last, to him was "the common-sense of the soul" ; it distinguished greatness from triviality, mere fancifulness from beauty that lights up the deeps of thought."

12. YEATS'S SYMBOLISM

What is Symbolism ?

The word 'symbol' derives from the Greek verb "symballein", meaning "to put together", and the related noun, "symbolon", meaning "mark", "token", or "sign". The term in literary usage refers most specifically to a manner of representation in which what is shown means, by virtue of association, something *more* or something *else*. Thus, a literary symbol unites an image (the analogy) and an idea or conception (the subject) which that image suggests or evokes —as when, for example, the image of climbing a staircase (the difficulty involved in the effort to raise oneself) is used to suggest the idea of "raising" oneself spiritually on becoming purified in T. S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*. Hence, a symbol is a trope, in that a simile, metaphor, personification, allegory.

Generally, 'symbolism' may be defined as "the represenation of a reality on one level of reference by a corresponding reality on another." In literature, the symbolic use of a word is distinguished from the emotive use of a word and is tantamount to intending the dictionary definition of the word. But a symbol may also be a sign. According to Kenneth Berke, "A symbol is the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience." As such, it is marked by power or complexity.

According to Edmund Wilson, symbolism is an attempt by carefully studied means—a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors—to communicate unequal personal feeling. Because of this complexity and depth and power of the symbol, C. M. Bowra regards symbolic poetry as a kind of mystic poetry, a poetry in which the poet tries to convey his sense of the mystery of life.

The Function and Importance of the Symbol

Symbolism is necessary for a poet who wants to say more than what meets the ear, wants to suggest something beyond the expressed meaning. When Blake wanted to give an idea of the ferocity of nature, he used the image of the bright burning tiger. The sense of mystery and expansiveness, the feelings of richness and complexity, a symbol may communicate cannot be communicated ordinarily by other means. Symbols make the language rich and expressive. Concepts which by their very nature are inexpressible can be conveyed in this way. A symbol can be used to convey "pure sensation", or the poet's apprehension of transcendental mystery.

The symbol may serve

(a) to interpret a theme,
(b) to make it acceptable,
(c) as an escape,
(d) to awaken dormant or suppressed experience, and
(e) as adornment or exhibition.

Kinds of Symbols

Symbols have been divided into two kinds—(i) traditional, and (ii) personal. Some others have divided them into religious symbols and literary symbols. Paul Elmer More divides them into the following four kinds :

1. Significative symbols (the arbitrary, conventional signs).
2. Metaphoric.
3. Commemorative.
4. Sacramental.

The first two kinds among these are primarily literary symbols and the others are primarily religious symbols.

History of the Symbolic Movement

Seeds of symbolism may be traced in the allegories of Langland, Spenser and Bunyan, the poetry of the Metaphysicals, William Blake and to some extent in the poetry of the Romantic poets. But that is a scattered kind of Symbolism except that of Blake. Moreover, a symbol is different from an allegory. An allegory is a product of fancy and is inferior to the symbolic technique. The symbol expresses a deep ahd complex spiritual phenomenon whereas the allegory provides a sense of fun and entertainment.

W. B. Yeats himself, in his essays, "Symbolism in Painting and "Symbolism in Poetry", touched upon this subject. In "Symbolism in Painting", he says that in England people have confused symbol with allegory. *Faerie Queene* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* were classical works and allegory was always treated superior to symbolism. It was Blake who first distinguished between symbol and the allegory. Blake said : "A symbol is, indeed, the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame ; while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to imagination ; the one is revelation, the other amusement." Blake also wrote, "Vision or imagination (Symbolism) is a representation of what actually exists really or unchangeably. Fable or allegory is formed by the daughters of Memory."

According to Yeats also an allegory is a product of memory whereas a symbol embodies vision and represents reality which is unchangeable, and it is difficult to mention where one merges into the other. Symbolism, says Yeats, deepens the philosophy and enables the artist to grapple with divine reality, and that with the help of symbols deeper effects can be created and subtler indefinable shades can be expressed.

Symbolism as a conscious movement was born in France as a reaction against naturalism and precision, and exactitude of the naturalist school represented by Zola. Symbolism, as a school, therefore, was announced in a manifesto in the *Figaro* of 1886, by a group of writers known for twenty years as "Decadents", to describe a mode of literary expression in which words are used to suggest states of mind rather than for their objective, representational or intellectual content :

> "The symbolist poetry seeks to clothe the idea with a sensory form which, however, would not be its own end......... Thus in this art......all concrete phenomena are mere sensory appearances destined to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial Ideas."

The movement, contemporary with impressionism in painting and in music, and with the philosophy of the subconscious culminating in Bergson, coincides with the idealism of the late 19th century, and is an offshoot of romanticism to which it is connected by an almost uninterrupted, if sometimes underground current, and more generally, to a mystical conception of the universe, derived more or less remotely from Neo-Platonism.

Characteristics of Symbolism

The French Symbolists, led by Mallarme and Verlaine, condemned mere 'exterriority', and laid great emphasis on the treatment of the sensations or the representation of the vague, fleeting impressions that constantly pass before the mind's eye. It meant a virtual withdrawal from life, a concentration on inner experience and its expression through the use of symbols. Arthur Symon's views in this connection are worthy of note. He says that the doctrine of mysticism with which all symbolic literature has so much to do, of which it is all as much the expression, presents us with a theory of life which makes us familiar with mystery, and which seems to harmonize those instincts which make for religion, passion and art, freeing us at once of great bondage.

Broadly speaking, the term 'Symbolist' applied to the first generation of French poets after Baudelaire, and rather more loosely to the first modern poets in other countries, suggests this very idea : that the poet can best express the dream and drama of his intuitions, his feelings and uncertainties in the form of a symbolic legend. He uses an old myth or invents a new one as a means of revealing perceptions for which he cannot find direct language. Symbolism is a method of oblique statement suitable to an age that finds truth only in rare moments of intense vision : it is half-way to a parable.

The symbolists attempted to exclude from art those elements which in life had receded into the realm of the general, the commonplace. Thus, the symbolists tended to repudiate outer actuality, which they identified with bourgeois civilization, and, returning into themselves, to concentrate upon their own experience, which became more and more private and personal. The representative symbolists—Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarme—in their search of ideal beauty weakened their grip on actual life, and this made it easier for successors to run away from actually altogether experience. The flaw in symbolism was its over-concentration on the exotic, the bizarre. Symbolism and Aestheticism should not be confused. The first is a doctrine of art, springing from artistic practices ; the second, desires from theory and tends to become an attitude to life—a very different thing.

Yeats as a Symbolist

Yeats himself wrote :

"I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made Amid the dreams of youth." —*Upon a Dying Lady*

Arthur Symons dedicated his book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* to W. B. Yeats and called him "the chief representative of that movement in our country." To W. Y. Tyndall, Yeats was a symbolist and that he was a symbolist from the beginning of his career to the end. Symons makes it plain that Yeats belongs not to the French Symbolist Movement but rather to a general European movement of which the French are leaders. Later critics have differed (perhaps they have been less accurate). C. M. Bowra in his *Heritage of Symbolism* (1943) takes it for granted that Yeats is heir to the French, and Edmund Wilson in *Axel's Cestle* (1931), searching for connections to support his thesis, went so far as to invent a meeting between Yeats and Mallarme. Joseph Hone, accepting Yeats as an heir to the French, asserts in his *Life of W. B. Yeats* (1943), that Yeats was familiar with the *Hereodiade* of Villiers de L'Isle Adam, an assertion which would carry more weight if Mallarme had not written it and if Yeats had been familiar with it. In W. Y. Tyndall's opinion ("*The Symbolism of W. B. Yeats*"), Yeats was an heir to the French through Symons.

It is very difficult to state with authority whether Yeats adopted Symbolism through Mallarme or through Pater, Blake, Shelley and above all Symons. Yeats did not know French, and it is doubtful that he ever met Mallarme. Whatever knowledge of the French symbolistic technique he had was derived at secondary sources through Arthur Symons' translation of the works of Mallarme, Villiers, and other French symbolists or through discussions with him. His own theories of symbolism are derived wholly from those of Arthur Symons. After meeting with him in the nineties, he disowned or repudiated his former theories of art wherein he had advanced the view that Irish writers should revive the Celtic mythology and legend to serve the cause of Irish nationalism, and that they should fix upon their memories the appearances of mountains and rivers, and make it visible in all their art.

Nonetheless, Yeats absorbed certain of the doctrines of Symbolism as preached by Mallarme through the medium of Arthur Symons. Like George, but rather less convulsively, he dispelled his early dreams and woke to an agonized concern for the events of his day. Like Rilke, he abandoned a picturesque and sentimental myth for an individual one ; like Velery, he composed a personal music, setting abstruse ideas to the lightest and surest of lyrical measures ; and like Jimenez, he found his greatest strength in old age. Unlike all these, however, except Stefan George, he was never 'a pure poet'. Indeed, he introduced extraneous images into even the finest of his poems ; and there are few that do not become clearer by the exploration of his philosophical beliefs.

However, his imagery can seldom be treated like that of Rilke, as a purely poetic system, revolving round the fixed star of the creative act. Yeats's system depended on the almost equal pull of two poles, that of poetry and that of semi-religious belief. Only in very few poems, of which '*Byzantium*' is one, does strength of vision draw these opposite poles into a complete relation with one another. It is not by chance that Yeats thought of life and creation as a dance of opposites.

In 1901, he was led to formulate, in an essay on "Magic", the following set of beliefs, to which he adhered unto the last :

(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.

What Yeats was really approaching here was some such systematic study of the symbolism of myths, trances, dreams and other human visions as psycho-analysis and anthropology were attempting from a different direction. Later on in his essay, "The Symbolism of Poetry," he declared :

"The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we

> are both asleep and awake which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us walking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols."

And he continued :

> "If people were to accept the theory that poetry moves us because of its symbolism, what change should one look for in the manner of our poetry ? A return to the way of our fathers, a casting out of descriptions of nature for the sake of nature, of the moral law for the sake of the moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of that brooding over scientific opinion that so extinguished the central flame in Tennyson : ......; or in other words, we should come to understand that the beryl stone was enchanted by our fathers that it might unfold the pictures in its heart and not to mirror our excited faces, or the boughs weaving outside the window."

No doubt Yeats was influenced by the French symbolists, but he was a symbolist poet long before he had heard of the French. He based his symbolism upon the poetry of Blake, Shelley, and Rossetti, and above all these, upon the occult. In 1886, under the spell of Madame Blavatsky, Keats joined the Dublin Lodge of the Theosophical Society, and two years later he joined the Ballistical Society, whose leader, MacGeorge Mathers, maintained connections with the similar order of Stanislas de Guaita in Paris. From the works of Madame Blavatsky, Yeats learned that Anima Mundi, a reservoir of all that has touched mankind, may be evoked by symbols. From Swedenborg, he received the doctrine of correspondence, from Eliphas Levi the doctrine of magical incantations and symbols which have power over spiritual and magical reality and from Boehme the similar doctrine of signatures. The Emerald Tables of Hermes Trismegistus informed him that things below are as things above. And the symbolic ritual of the Rosicrucians confirmed these ideas. A rebel against the world of matter, Yeats learned that all material things correspond to concepts in the world of spirit, and that through the use of material objects as magical symbols the adept may call down disembodied powers.

Besides Mallarme and other French symbolists, Yeats was also familiar with Maeterlinck's symbolism. He had seen Maeterlinck's plays and studied articles on occultism. He admired an element of reaction in them against naturalism. W. Y. Tyndall says, "These plays were produced in English on the London stage, starting with L'Intruse, January 1892, and his plays were translated and published in London almost as soon as they were published in France." By and large Yeats had the knowledge of symbolism through Maeterlinck's plays and Symons's translations of Mallarme. Through his association with Maud Gonne and Iseult Gonne, he was in contact with the French. Iseult had translated Claudel, Peguy, and Valery for Yeats. Symons had made selections from Mallarme's *Herodiade* which attracted the attention of Yeats.

The essay "Magic" (1901) by Yeats expresses his conviction that the great memory of nature "can be evoked by symbols." Like Baudelaire, who had read Swedenborg before him, Yeats became a poetic visionary, and like Rimbaund, who had followed Eliphas Levi, Yeats became "magus", a master of magic who through poetic symbols and trances could surprise reality in its lair. Although he had never heard of Baudelaire or Rimbaund during his reading of Levi and Swedenborg, Yeats belonged with these poets to the great transcendental movement of the nineteenth century and turned naturally to the same supernatural sources. Material reality became for him as for them a chaos of symbols through which a poet could deal directly with spiritual orders. The example of Blake, also an occultist, taught Yeats the use in poetry of magical symbols ; and the poems of Shelley, which he carefully analyzed, confirmed his symbolic system. Like Blake, Baudelaire and Rimbaund, Yeats saw the poet as magus and priest, but as poet before magus and priest. Knowing what he was about, he went to the occult in the first place to discover, if he could, the law of the imagination, to find ways of inducing trance and vision through which he could confront the inner and higher realities he needed, and to find images or symbols for his poetry.

Tyndall is of the opinion that the sources and influences on Yeats are not those of the French origin, and Yeats was a symbolist even before the French symbolists. He loved Blake, the great symbolist, and praised Shelley. His association with Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophy, his membership of the Golden Dawn, his interest in Kabbalah—all contributed to his love of symbols. Yeats's absorption in the world of unseen realities and his eulogy of visions deepened his faith in spiritual truth which could be grasped with the help of symbols. It has been argued that Yeats used symbolism to hide the world rather than to reveal another one. Yeats's love for symbolism was also necessitated by his predicament. He loved and worshipped Maud Gonne who became a symbol of beauty for him. But the anguish and frustration he had to face needed some cover ; hence, he used symbols to conceal his anguish.

William Butler Yeats is a symbolist from the beginning to the end of his career. The symbols of his early poems, like those of Villiers and of Levi, are occult in character. From Madame Blavatsky, Yeats learned that the great memory of nature preserves the legends of all nations, and that one may get into touch with *Anima Mundi* (or Great Memory) through symbols drawn from Irish legends, the symbolic characters of Oisin or Aengus, for example, or the hound with one red deer, the white deer with no horns, or the island in the sea. But equally characteristic are his arbitrary occult symbols of rose, cross, lily, bird, water, tree, moon and sun, which he could find in the Kabbalistic, Theosophical and the other profound works

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which constituted the greater part of his reading. The two trees in his poem of that name are the Sephirotic tree of the Kabbala and the tree of knowledge.

"The Rose"

Of Yeats's symbols the rose is the most complex. The symbols of rose meant several things. Yeats used it as an emblem of beauty, as representation of 'transcendental love of mystic rapture, of the inner reality, of divinity.' According to W. Y. Tyndall, "The only higher initiates were admitted to the secret of the Rose of Ruby, and the Cross of Gold, the fadeless rose of creation and the immortal Cross of Light or life itself, ecstasy and suffering, and union with god. Light, fire, the colour red symbolized, as in Zoroaster, the highest good. In the vault of initiation, there was a rose with a cross on the floor, and the vault was lit with the ray of a luminous rose. Father Christian Rosencrantz on whom Yeats wrote an essay was regarded as the founder of a society ; and the symbols of danger, cup, and rose, which appear in Yeats's diagram of the Great Wheel, were conspicuous in their ritual."

Yeats uses the symbol of rose in different contexts. In *The Secret Rose* the rose is intended to be a symbol of Esotericism :

> "Far-off, most secret and inviolate Rose,
> Enfold me in my hour of hours ; where those
> Who sought thee in the holy Sepulchre,
> Or in the wine-vat, dwell beyond the stir
> And tumult of defeated dreams ; and deep,
> Among pale eyelids, heavy with the sleep
> Men have named beauty. Thy great leaves enfold
> The ancient beards, the helm of ruby and gold
> Of the crowned Magi......"

In *The Rose of Peace*, love means earthly love as it does in a popular song ; but the rose in *The Rose of the World* has a complicated meaning. On the one hand it symbolizes transient earthly love and beauty, on the other, eternal love and beauty. The rose in *The Rose of Battle* is more occult, symbolizing god's side in the battle of spirit against matter or what inspires occultists and those who have failed of earthly love in their endless battle with the materialists. Here the rose is a refuge from earthly love. Wearing the militant rose of ruby and intellectual flame as the symbol of his life and hope, the Rosicrucian knight of the story "*Out of the Rose*" wages God's wars against outer order and fixity. The rose in "*To the Rose upon the Road of Time*" as the title of the poem implies, is the rose, but it is also the power of the creative imagination and occult philosophy which, Yeats fears, may remove him so completely from the present world that he will cease to be a poet. A similar fear plagues the hero of the story *Rose Alchemica*, an adventure in spiritual alchemy in which the rose as in Eliphas Levi means the "Great Work" of transmuting matter into spirit. Taken to the headquarters of the

Order of the Alchemical Rose, the hero joins the terrible dance. On the dancing floor, to increase his terror, is a great cross and on the ceiling a rose. The acting version of *The Shadowy Waters* has a passage on the rose and cross as a symbol of the union of body and soul, life and death, sleep and waking.—(Adapted from Tyndall). Needless to mention, that most of the rose poems were written in his first enthusiasm after reading *Axel*, with its Rosicrucian roses. But Yeats used the rose to mean more than Father Christian's *Rosy Cross* or MacGregor Mathers intended.

"The Wind among the Reeds"

In the poems comprised in the volume (1898), Yeats still uses Irish mythology and legends, his symbolism becomes personal, more suggestive and more complex. He now clothes his personal feelings and emotions in an elaborate garb of mythological symbolism. In his own words, personal emotion is woven into a general pattern of myth and symbol in this volume. Aedh, Hanrahan, Robartes, etc., are used as symbols to express the poet's own love, pain, suffering, and ecstasy. The poems, one after another, deal with an absolute beauty seen by the poet in an impersonal vision, but invested with a profound personal significance. And his vision of impersonal beauty always takes the form of Maud Gonne. The Sidhe, the Fairies, Aengus, the Celtic gods, the shadowy horses, all have traditional mythological significance. Thus, Sidhe, the defeated Gaelic gods are creatures of imagination, and are used as symbols to emphasize the severance between the real and the imaginary.

The Wind among the Reeds gives "dumb things voices and bodiless things bodies." Reviewing this volume, Arthur Symons hailed it as a triumph of symbolist indirection. Through the swooning, luscious diction, the musical, individual rhythms, the harmonies and overtones, and the interaction of many traditional but mysterious images each poem becomes the symbol of an unstatement more lavishly than the French were accustomed to do. The book is closer in feeling and method to the works of the French symbolists than any other which appeared in England in the nineties.

"A Vision"

A Vision (1925) has explicated his philosophy through his elaborate machinery of symbols. The human personality corresponds with twenty-eight phases of the moon represented through a great wheel with twenty-eight spokes. The soul passes through all the twenty-eight stages. His famous symbol is the symbol of interpenetrating gyres or whirling cones. The intermingling cones represent cyclic movement of history. They also symbolize subjectivity and objectivity of the soul. As quoted earlier, they are "value and fact, particular and universal quality and quantity......the living and dead, and all other images of our parents." These gyres have sexual significance and stand for the seal of Solomon used in magic.

In the *Vision*, the Earth, the Water, the Air, and the Fire are symbolic of the four ages of individual man as well as the four ages of civilization.

> "He with Body wages a fight ;
> Body won and walks upright.
> Then he struggled with the Heart ;
> Innocence and peace depart.
> Then he struggled with the mind,
> His proud Heart he left behind.
> Now his wars with God begin ;
> At stroke of midnight God shall win,"

Yeats himself explains this symbolism in a letter to Mrs. Shakespeare, suggesting :

I	II	III	IV
I. The First Age	The Earth	The bowels, etc.	Instinct
II. The Second Age	The Water	Blood/sex	Passion
III. The Third Age	The Air	Lungs/breath	Thought
IV. The Fourth Age	The Fire	Soul	Soul

In the first two ages, the moon comes to the full—resurrection of Christ and Dionysus. Man becomes nation, no longer driven from below or above.

The Later Poems

In the later poems like *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, the tower and the stair are both traditional and personal symbols. The tower symbolizes ascendancy, that is, soul's attempt to rise higher and higher and the winding stair stands for the difficulties that come in the way of such an ascendancy. At other times, the tower becomes a symbol of tradition, of national heritage, and at still some other times a symbol of violence, and of blood thirstiness. In *A Prayer for My Daughter*, the tower suggests his vision of the dark future of humanity. The 'Byzantium' poems are also symbolic. There is a creation of the spiritual world, the symbolic meaning of 'Leda and the Swan' is comprehensible. In the union between Leda and the Swan the juxtapositions of spirit and matter ase symbolized together. It also refers to the meeting of the man and the Dove and the Virgin. The poem, "The Delphic Oracle upon Plotinus" delineates unseen reality and the other themes. It refers to different philosophers and is symbolic and surrealistic.

So Yeats uses general as well as personal symbols. He distinguishes between two kinds of symbols, those that evoke emotions alone, and those that evoke ideas alone, or ideas mingled with emotions. His preference, however, is for the second type of symbols. Among the intellectual symbols there are two categories—co-operative and emphatic. While any symbols could serve either function, the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water frequently are good examples of co-operative symbols. They set up eddies of association which are auxiliary to the main symbols of the poem. That main or emphatic symbol is a centre of attraction around which the mood gathers, and many of Yeats's poems, from *The Rose of the World* to *The Black Tower*, are built around such centres. Yeats intended to keep the symbols as manifold as possible in their suggestibility. He tried to bring together in one symbol truth and beauty, spirit and intellect, passion and thought.

To conclude, Yeats based his symbolism upon Mallarme and Villiers, upon the poetry of Blake, Shelley, and Rossetti, and above all, upon the occult. From the works of Madame Blavatsky, he learned that *Anima Mundi*, a reservoir of all that has touched mankind may be evoked by symbols. From Swedenborg, he received the doctrine of magical incantations and symbols which have power over spiritual and material reality, and from Boehme the similar doctrine of signatures. The Emerald Table or Hermes Trismegistus informed him that things below are as things above. And the symbolic ritual of the Rosicrucians confirmed these ideas. Like Rimbaud and Baudelaire, Yeats belongs to the great transcendental movement of the nineteenth century. He went to Irish legendary past, to Nature and the great elements of the Universe, to the occult, to magic, to esotericism, to a number of philosophic and religious orders and poets to draw his images and symbols for poetry.

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13. YEATS'S MYSTICISM

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines a mystic as one 'who believes in the spiritual apprehension of truths beyond the understanding.' A mystic is not only conscious of a divine presence in nature, but he also feels that there is essential identity of being between Man, Nature, and God. On the one hand, he tries to unravel the mystery of this creation, the purpose behind it, man's predicament in the world, on the other, he tries to analyze the relationship between Soul and God. He is a person who seeks union with God and, through that, realization of truth beyond man's understanding. Defining mysticism, Rufus H. Jones observes—

> "I shall use the word mysticism to express the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage."[1]

The word 'mysticism' is, however, used with a number of different meanings and carries different connotations of different minds. To some it is simply a type of confused, irrational thinking. In the popular mind it is associated with spiritualism and clairvoyance, with hypnotism, and even with occultism and magic, with obscure psychological states and happenings, some of which are the results of neurasthenia, and other-worldliness, or to describe a nebulous outlook upon the world or a religious attitude which does not care for dogmas or the outward forms of religious observance. Some would limit its use to that rare state of consciousness which is found in the contemplative saints.

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[1] Rufus H. Jones, *Studies in Religion*, (London, 1909), p. xv.

The term used by medieval theologians was *contemplatio* (contemplation). It was used to designate a rare and advanced form of spiritual experience, not found among ordinary religious folk. To attain to a state of contemplation, men and women withdrew from the world and followed a way of life entirely different from that led by those who remained in the world. The word 'mystical' did not become current until the later Middle Ages, and 'mysticism' is indeed quite a modern word.

Medieval theologians described what they termed 'mystical theology' as 'experimental wisdom', or as 'a stretching out of the soul into God through the urge of love', or as 'an experimental knowledge of God through unifying love.' These definitions all approach mysticism from the theological standpoint.

Others have approached it from the psychological angle, for instance, Von Hartmann, who defines mysticism as 'the filling of the consciousness by a content (feeling, thought, desire) by an involuntary emergence of the same from the unconscious.' Du Prel wrote as follows :

> "The mystical phenomena of the soul-life are anticipations of the biological process. Soul is our spirit within the self-consciousness, spirit is the soul beyond the self-consciousness."

Goethe called mysticism "the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feelings" ; others have used such phrases as 'intellectual intuition' and 'formless speculation'.

Again, some writers emphasize the noetic or intellectual quality of mystical experience, as, for instance, Lasson, when he writes :

> "The essence of mysticism is the assertion of an intuition which transcends the temporal categories of the understanding, relying on speculative reason. Rationalism cannot conduct us to the essence of things ; we, therefore, need intellectual vision."

Dr. Radhakrishnan, the Indian philosopher also emphasizes this noetic quality, when he calls mysticism 'integrated thought', in that it brings things together in a new pattern, *i. e.*, integrates them, instead of, as in analytical thought, breaking them into parts. It, thus relates them into parts. It relates them into a meaningful whole. It is a sort of creative insight, springing from a deep unconscious part of the psyche. Evelyn Underhill, in *Practical Mysticism*, defines mysticism as the art of union with Reality, or God. She writes :

> "Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The Mystic is a person who has attained union in a greater or lesser degree ; or who aims at and believes in such attainment."

Prof. A. Seth puts forward a similar point of view. He states :

> "It (mysticism) appears in connexion with the endeavour of the human mind to grasp the Divine essence or the ultimate reality of things and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the highest."

In Appendix A of his *Christian Mysticism*—(Methuen), Dean Inge gives no less than twenty-six definitions of mysticism.

Amidst this variation of definitions, we should regard mysticism as a particular and distinct sort of 'spirituality' and examine it as a type of experience, as a way of knowledge, and as a state of consciousness, for mysticism in art or literature is positively different from mysticism practised by a saint or preached by a philosopher. In literature, it is an apprehension of divine presence in nature ; it is a consciousness of the essential 'oneness of all :' it is a matter of faith. It is irrational and cannot be conveyed logically ; it is a belief in the immortality of the human soul. A mystic literary artist has a vision of experience, of life which is shaped by his experiences and observations, his studies and realizations, or he may have visions too as Blake and Yeats have.

Mystic note runs through Yeats's poetry from the beginning to the end of his career. As someone has pertinently remarked, the world of Yeats's poetry is the world "of a mystic visionary in which the gods and fairies of Celtic mythology live again." He was convinced of the realities of the fairies and other supernatural beings ; he also believed in magic and the occult. Yeats himself wrote in his *Autobiographies* :

> "I planned a mystical order which should buy or lure the castle, and keep it as a place where its members could retire for a while for contemplation and where we might establish mysteries like those of Eleusis and Samothrace ; and for ten years to come my most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find philosophy and to create ritual for that order."

It is evident that Yeats very much wanted to start a mystical order to be able to devote himself to the spiritualistic aims. He had his predilection for the magical practices popular in Europe. He became a member of the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn in 1890. The Hermetic followers had faith in magic and propounded occultism and secrecy. Mathers introduced Yeats to a clergyman who recounted his experiences of evil spirits. Mathers studied *Mysterious Magnum* of Boehme and related to Yeats how he imagined to be a ram in a field of flock and the sheep ran after him. Yeats himself has related a few marvels in his *Autobiographies*. Yeats loved occultism and comprehended significance of spiritual world, magic, mysteries and meditation. He also studied Blake and Swedenborg. Maxmuller's work about East. Jubanville's work on Celtic subjects, James Fraser's *The Golden Bough* which was preoccupied with the immortality of soul, Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, insistence on myth, faith and fatalism all helped to shape his mystic vision. Yeats's study of Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, his familiarity with the theosophists, the occultists, the esoterics, the Kabbalists, the Boehmians, the Neo-Platonists, the Christian Rosencrantz, the Rosicrucianists, and Eastern thought and philosophy, study of Plato and Plotinus deepened and widened his mystic vision. Under the banners and influences of the occultists, the theosophists, the believers in magic, the Kabbalists, the Rosicrucianists and the Vedantists, he began to formulate a system of his own which he finally brought out in *A Vision* (first published in 1925 and later revised and republished in 1937).

The following statements of Yeats may stand as an evidence of Yeats's mystical outlook :

1. Yeats wrote to O'Leary in 1892 in a letter : "If I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a word of my Blake Book, nor would *The Countess Cathleen* ever have come to exist. The mystical life is the centre of all that I do, and all that I think and all that I write."

2. "I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that is created, or could create part of the one history, and that of the soul's."

3. "I had an unshakable conviction, arising how or whence, I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature and set before Irishmen for special manual, an Irish literature, which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols."

4. "I think all happiness in life depends on having the energy to assume the mask of some other self ; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself—something created in a moment and perpetually renewed ; in playing a game like that of a child where one loses the infinite pain of self-realization, a grotesque or solemn painted face put on that one may haste from the terrors of judgment. An imaginative saturnalia that one may forget reality. Perhaps all the sins and energies of the world are but the world's flight from the infinite blinding beam."

When he was preparing *The Wanderings of Oisin* for press, he wrote to Katharine Tynan that his poetry so far was 'the cry of the heart against necessity,' and that he hoped some day to write poetry of insight and knowledge. Evidently, he was not content to make love and the contemporary world his subject-matter ; the world of the seen and the psychical universe was not the last end of poetry. Even in middle age he wrote in an essay :

> "The imaginative writer differs from the saint in that he identifies himself—to that neglect of his own soul, alas !—with the soul of the world, and frees himself from all that is impermanent in that soul, an ascetic not of women and wine but of the newspapers. That which is permanent in the soul of the world, on the other hand, the great passions that trouble all and have but a brief recurring life of flower and seed in any man, is the renunciation of the saint, who seeks not an eternal art but his own eternity."[1]

Yeats was influenced by the Vedantic philosophy. Quite early in his career he came into contact with Mohini Chatterjee and was profoundly influenced by Indian thought. His acquaintance with Purohit Swami after 1931 furthered his knowledge of and interest in the *Upanishads*, and he wanted to produce a European Geeta. His early work includes three poems on Indian themes, and the Indian landscapes of these poems are alive, with the life of one spirit enveloping the universe and this faith remains an integral part of his poetry up to the very end. This conviction is voiced forcefully and clearly in the *Indian upon God* :

"I passed a little further on, and heard a peacock say,
Who made the grass and made the worms and made my
feathers gay,
He is a monstrous peacock, and he waveth all the night
His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots of light."

This note of mysticism is further struck in another poem towards the close of the poet's career :

"I proclaim that there is
Among birds or beasts or men,
One that is perfect or at peace
× × × ×
All that could run or leap or swim
Whether is wood, water and cloud,
Acclaiming, proclaiming, declaiming Him."

Quite early in life Yeats had lost faith in Christianity as well as in Victorian science. He had his own convictions, but he searched for a pattern or a system which may give form and coherence to his beliefs. This led him to magic, to astronomy, to Theosophy, to Plato and Plotinus, and to other occult studies. At last he succeeded in formulating a system of his own which has been elaborated at length in *A Vision*.[2] This system of Yeats is a curious mixture of Christianity, philosoohy, mythology, magic, alchemy, the occult and expository symbolism. His theory of masks, his theory of the cyclic process of history, the revolution of gyres, the correspondence between the phases of the Moon and the phases of human personality, his concept of *Anima Mundi* and *Spiritus Mundi*, etc. are essentially mystical in nature,

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[1] *The Two Kinds of Asceticism*, (*Collected Works*, Vol. VIII).

[2] For a detailed discussion of this system, please see Chapter 16 entitled "Yeats's Occultism, Philosophy and Esoteric Doctrine."

Mystical states have certain marked characteristics. First of all, a mystical state has the quality of ineffability ; it also has a noetic quality. Mystical states can seldom be sustained for long ; they have thus the quality of transiency. They have the quality of passivity, and the presence of a consciousness of the Oneness of everything, and the sense of timelessness. Bound up with the sense of oneness and the sense of timelessness, there is another characteristic of mystical experience, the conviction that the familiar phenomenal ego is not the real I. The *Atman* is immortal, constant, and unchanging, and is not bound by spacetime. On minute analysis, we will find that most of these characteristics can be found in Yeats's mysticism. Like a mystic, Yeats too was subject to visions and trances. He sought to convey them through symbols which are not always intelligible, for how can a person without mystic exercises, and experience can understand them. A number of poems deal with his spiritualistic experiences and visions. In *All Soul's Night*, the theme is *seance*, the calling up of departed spirits ; in the *Double Vision of Michael Robartes*, he gives us two visions of great importance. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, he tries to find out mystic joy :

"So great a sweetness flows into the breast,
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest."

In *Under Ben Bulben* he speaks of reincarnation :

"Many times man lives and dies
Between his two eternities,
That of race and that of soul,
And ancient Ireland knew it all."

These lines show that he had learnt it not only from India but also from Ireland. In old age he could once again declare—

"Homer is my example and his unchristened heart,"

In *The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland*, one of the best of his early poems, he recognizes the power to withdraw from life as a gift not wholly blessed. In *The Winding Stair*, he records the intent of his mysticism :

"The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it takes, the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark."

In *A Full Moon in March* he comes out :

> "He with body waged a fight,
> But body won ; it walks upright.
> Then he struggled with the heart :
> Incocence and peace depart.
> Then he struggled with the mind :
> His proud heart he left behind.
> Now his wars on God begin :
> At stroke of midnight God shall win."

Who but a mystic-poet could utter these lines, not one who simply had reverence for God out of some projected faith, but a seer and a visionary, a mystic and a gnostic who had tried hard to know and understand truth :

> "Though leaves are many, the root is one ;
> Through all the lying days of my youth
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun ;
> Now I may wither into truth."

And by the time he reached the stage of writing *The Tower*, he found that Truth could not be discovered so easily with magic and the Kabbalists, with mere attempts of interpreting it now with the help of the symbols, now with the help of signs taught to him by Mathers, by marvels to whom he had been initiated by Madame Blavatsky. He also found much truth in what Mohini Chatterjee and Purohit Swami had told him, in what the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* had told him. In his attempt to hold infinity under his palm, he widened and widened his system unto the last. At one stage he wanted to incorporate Plato and Plotinus also. In fact what he was doing was an attempt towards a system, which should be a fusion of Christianity and Paganism, of East and West, of Magic and Truth, of natural and supernatural. of feeling and intellect, of religion and philosophy, of myth and reality, primary and antithetical. Yet he could not succeed, for the union of Soul with Brahma is not such an easy task :

> "It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
> Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
> Until imagination, ear and eye,
> Can be content with argument and deal
> In abstract things..."
>
> —*The Tower.*

As David Daiches has rightly stated that all his life Yeats searched for a pattern, while a mystic tries to shatter all patterns "He seeks to impose order, not, as the true mystic does, to break down a too neatly ordered system and get beyond it......He turns to mysticism not in search of shattering new insight, but in quest of categories, often maintaining a casual scepticism concerning what to the mystic themselves were the essential truths."—(David Daiches). Or, as Prof. Stock has observed, "Yeats not only believed in supernatural power, but acknowledged the divinity of Christ more unequivocally than some of them. Yet he could not be called a follower of Christ, for it was not in Christian teaching, whether scripturally or traditionally interpreted, that he sought the all-inclusive self ; life-giving sap drawn up through the roots rather than rain falling from heaven on the leaves. By pushing the metaphor further one might say that all the waters of life are from one primal fountain, or say in Yeats's own terms that in the phaseless sphere there is no distinction between primary and antithetical." Therefore, "this aloofness pervades the whole of his thought and sets him as far from Christianity, or indeed from any of the great religious folds, as from atheism or materialism. He demonstrates that a man can walk alone. In our age of collective security this is a portent, all the more significant, because so few desire to see it."—(A. G. Stock).

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14. YEATS'S NATIONALISM AND IRISH THEMES

By his birth and temperament, by the accident of his upbringing, and also by deliberate choice, he was the poet of the Irish tradition. He writes on the past and the present of Ireland, and dreams of an ideal state in Ireland in his poetry. He is rightly the National and Nationalistic poet of Ireland as well as the poet of the Celtic Twilight. Ireland is always in the mind of the poet when he is writing. The following lines begin like an answer to some accusations, from Maud Gonne perhaps or from John O'Leary, of turning away Ireland's battle for freedom to lose himself in visions :

> "Nor be I any less of them,
> Because the red-rose broidered hem
> Of her, whose history began
> Before God made the angelic clan,
> Trails all about the written page
> For in the world's first blossoming age
> The light fell off her flying feet
> Made Ireland's heart begin to beat ;
> And still the starry candles flare
> To help her light foot here and there,
> And still the thoughts of Ireland brood
> Upon her holy quietude."

So he "declares that he is a true patriot poet ; his vision is of that which gives meaning to the soul of Ireland and therefore to the battle itself." He has exploited to the full Saga of Ireland and the Celtic legends. His poems like *Fergus and the Druid*, *Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea*, *The Song of Wandering Aengus*, *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*, *Easter 1916*, and a number of others are based on Irish politics.

Yeats's love for and interest in Irish nationalism was fostered and fanned by his ancestry (Yeats's father also was a nationalist), the contemporary Irish political scene, O'Leary, and Maud Gonne, besides the inherent and temperamental liking for the glorious past of Ireland and anxiety for its future.

Yeats was very much stimulated by John O'Leary's sacrifices and achievements. Yeats met him at Contemporary Club and O'Leary stirred in Yeats the 'desire of the intellectual leadership in Ireland'. O'Leary was connected with the Fenian conspiracy and had remained in jail for five years and was in exile in Paris for fifteen years. In "A General Introduction for My Work," Yeats himself writes, "It was through the old Fenian leader John O'Leary I found my theme. His long imprisonment, his longer banishment, his pride, his integrity, all that aristocratic dream nourished amid little shops and little farms, had drawn around him a group of young men ; I was but eighteen or nineteen......He gave me the poems of Thomas Davis, said they were not good poetry but had changed his life when a young man, spoke of other poets associated with Davis and *The Nation* newspaper, probably lent me their books......Then somebody, not O'Leary, told me of Standish O'Grady and his reinterpretation of Irish legends. O'Leary had sent me to O'Curry, but his unarranged and uninterpreted history defeated my boyish indolence."

So O'Leary was Yeats's National Guru. "Though O'Leary was a critic of Yeats's preternaturalism, yet he recognized the talent in him. Yeats contributed Irish ballads to O'Leary's newspaper *The Gael, Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* was brought out in 1888 by the young writers in collaboration with Katharine Tynan and Douglas Hyde. Yeats became a Nationalist and visited the Nationalists' houses in Dublin." A patriotic society met in the lecture hall of a workmen's club with O'Leary for President, and four or five Catholic students. O'Leary, and Taylor spoke on 'Irish History and Irish Literature'. Yeats's interest in Irish history and literature grew immensely, and he began to contribute poems, articles and plays on Ireland and Irish themes.

His articles were published in *Irish Monthly* and *Irish Fireside*. He also contributed to the Irish American papers like the *Providence Journal* and the *Boston Pilot*. Between 1885 and 1890, Yeats took an active part in the Irish Nationalistic Movement. Irish Republican Brotherhood was formed to secure independence of Ireland after Parnell's fall. Between 1885 and 1890, it was believed that Home Rule will be brought in Ireland by Parnell who had influence over Irish M.P's. In 1890, Parnell's reputation suffered a set-back because of his relationship with O'Shea's wife who was divorced by her husband on grounds of adultery. Parnell lost the leadership and there was no chance of Home Rule. O'Leary founded with T. W. Rolleston, "The Irish Literary Society of London" in December 1891; and the National Literary Society in Dublin in May 1892. The immediate object was to publicize the literature, folklore, and legends of Ireland. Yeats joined this National Society and offered to send a travelling theatre to organize shows on Irish themes.

Yeats also joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1896. As President of it, in 1898, he tried to bring unity in its London and Dublin factions and tried to persuade both Parnellites and anti-Parnellites to join the I. R. B. The object was that the Dublin Committee should proclaim itself an Irish Parliament, give oders to the Irish M. P's., as their representatives in the British Parliament, and eventually declare complete independence.

Maud Gonne, whom Yeats loved above everything was the primary source of getting him pushed into active politics. After Maud Gonne's fiery speech, in 1897, which caused a riot, both Maud Gonne and Yeats resigned from the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Independence seemed to be a far cry ; the movement soon began to fizzle out. A disillusioned Ireland turned from parliamentary politics. The Gaelic League was founded by Dr. Hyde : it was a sort of platform for political argument. Yeats started forming societies to popularize and propagate the Irish literature which was created in English. The political nationalism was thus transformed into literary nationalism. Otherwise too, Yeats's interest in Irish Nationalism was primarily literary, and if he had joined the active politics, it was mainly because of Maud Gonne who he knew would be pleased by his active involvement in Irish Nationalistic Movement.

So Yeats turned from Irish politics to Irish literature. "Meanwhile I had begun a movement," writes Yeats, "in English, in the language in which modern Ireland thinks and does its business ; found societies where clerks, working-men, men of all classes, could study the Irish poets, novelists and historians who had been translated into English but the great mass of our people, accustomed to interminable political speeches, read little, and so from the very start we felt that we must have a theatre of our own." (*Autobiographies*). Thus was founded Irish Literary Theatre to which Yeats also contributed his plays. He wrote *Countess Cathleen* for this theatre. From 1894 to 1899, Yeats was involved in the Irish Dramatic Movement. He delivered lectures to the Irish Literary Society in London and compiled *A Book of Irish Verse.* Irish Literary Theatre had Yeats, Martyn and Moore as its directors. Later on the Abbey Theatre was started with Yeats and Lady Gregory as its directors. It produced Yeats's *Deirdre* in 1907.

Regarding Yeats's nationalism, Prof. A. G. Stock has made some significant observations : "For political manoeuvres his imagination had no sympathy. The parliamentary lobbying and back-stairs bargaining, the small-town political committees where great ideas are twisted to the ends of small men—such means could only bring the wrong men forward and destroy the very values that made liberty worth winning. Yeats did not idealize all his countrymen but claimed that they had a better tradition of life than the English, and wanted them to live by it. Nor did economic arguments mean much to him : he himself had never found poverty degrading and did not think wealth necessarily ennobling, nor that men would fight better for small savings of rent and property than for an idea which possessed their souls. He worshipped Parnell as a leader, but that was because of a proud, cold quality in the man who could use politics and economics as weapons without subduing his spirit to them. People did not follow Parnell because he promised them votes or incomes, but because he was a man who put the spirit of greatness into the fight he led—the kind of man for whom stars fell at his funeral. When Parnell was gone the heroism went out of politics. Yeats's mind turned naturally to a literary and artistic revival, which was as necessary to his vision of Ireland as political freedom itself. He needed no leader here ; out of his own intuition he prophesied what must come, and did much to bring it about.

"Though a poet and not a statistician, his vision of Ireland was not entirely a subjective fantasy. No doubt there is always a subjective element in patriotism ; men at the same time inherit values from their country and credit it with those that nourish their self-respect. But Yeats lived both in England and Ireland and judged what he himself experienced. As a boy, when his father lived in London, he had gone to an English day-school ; then the family returned to Dublin and he was an art student there, and conversed with patriots and mystics, and sat at the feet of Mohini Chatterji ; then again they were in London and he lived in his father's house, writing literary gossips for two Irish American papers to earn a thin living without putting Ireland out of his thoughts. He was meeting English men of letters and beginning to be known as a poet. But always he spent part of the year at his uncle's home in Sligo and always the atmosphere of his father's house was Irish, so that although he had his name to make in the London literary world, it was never the whole world of his mind ; he half-belonged to a life quite unlike it."

No doubt it was as an Irish poet in the English language that Yeats aspired to become known. He knew no national language of Ireland, Gaelic ; that is why he wrote in English. He said, "I could no more have written Gaelic than can those Indians write in English ; Gaelic is my national language, but it is not my mother-tongue " Although Yeats was an Irish poet, he was also a cosmopolitan. At last, he transcended Irishness, though remaining as a cosmopolitan. "When he wrote *A Vision*," says Ellmann Richard, "he forgot he was an Irishman. And while he calls the fairies by their Irish name of Sidhe, I suspect that they too are internationalists. His later versions of perpetual beings are, except in the play *The Dreaming of the Bones*, indifferent to race although they retain their interest in families and individuals. Irishness is an essential quality, but a secondary one."

With other Irish patriots, hatred for England was a great obsession. So was it with a number of great Irish writers. Yeats at many a time, whether sincerely or out of oratory, echoes such sentiments. At a centenary celebration of Wolfe Tone (in 1898) he said :

> "We hated at first the ideals and ambitions of England, the materialisms of England, because they were here, but we have come to hate them with a nobler hatred. We hate them

> now because they are evil. We have suffered too long from them, not to understand, that hurry to become rich, that delight in mere bigness, that insolence to the weak are evil and vulgar things......We are building up a nation which shall be moved by noble purpose and to noble ends."

That his poetry should reawaken the soul of Ireland was an obvious intention. But gradually Yeats gave up this hatred for England. Torn in a love-hatred dilemma for England, he confesses in his "A General Introduction to My Work", (*Essays and Introductions*) :

> "......Then I remind myself that though mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English, and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, I speak, and write, that everything I love has come to me through English ; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. I am like the Tibetan monk who dreams at his initiation that he is eaten by a wild beast and learns on waking that he himself is eater and eaten. This is Irish hatred and solitude, the hatred of human life that made Swift write *Gulliver* and the epitaph upon his tomb, that can still make us wag between extremes and doubt our sanity."

So Yeats becomes wiser and saner. As a pure artist, he begins to dream of an integrated vision of Europe, for there had been ages when the consciousness of Europe was integrated ; all men could draw on a collective understanding because all understood the same images, though not at the same depth. Active work crystallized the notion into a more precise programme of cultural unity. He got convinced that religion and politics could not create great and pure poetry. It was the notion of cultural unity that could help a poet. "A writer of talent turned naturally to England both for his public and his model. Yeats's idea of Ireland required a national literature. He wanted Irish writers to be conscious of a past ; he wanted the native legends and folklore to be widely enough known to be medium of their image-thinking which is the wisdom of poetry and the language of a national mind."—(A. G. Stock). Rightly says Ellmann Richard, "Yeats's Irishness is of a special kind. Like Joyce's prose, his poetry makes use of national and local borders only to transcend them. He is Irish ; he is also anti-Irish in an Irish way,......... ..His method of treating his Irish background and subject-matter is therefore, exceedingly complex. Ireland is a symbol for the world, and he is caught between estrangement and love for both." Hence, it is clear that William Butler Yeats, an exponent of mystical doctrines and occulttsm, is also endowed with strong nationalism. But his nationalism is not of a rebel or of a narrow-minded politician ; it is very much literary He hated not the English, but the English rule in Ireland. He believed that literature held an important place in the regeneration of a nation. Rightly said Yeats in one of his poems :

> "Know, that I would accounted be
> True brother of a company
> That sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong."
>
> —*To Ireland in the Coming Times.*

15. YEATS'S TREATMENT OF MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

In his poem, *A Coat*, Yeats declared :

> "I made my song a coat
> Covered with embroideries
> Out of old mythologies
> Dragons and gods and moons
> From heel to throat
> And gave it to my song
> And my song wore it ;
> But the fools caught it,
> Wore it in the world's eyes
> As though they'd wrought it.
> Song, let them take it,
> For there'e more enterprise
> In walking naked."
>
> —*A Coat.*

In some of his letters, speeches and essays also, he evinced his love for Irish mythology and folklore.

(1) In 1889, Yeats, then twenty-four years old, gave some fatherly advice to an aspiring poetess, and wrote to her : "You will find it a good thing to make verses on Irish legends and places and so forth. It helps originality—and makes one's verses sincere, and gives one less numerous competitors. Besides, one should love best what is nearest and most interwoven with one's life."

(2) "Presently I convinced myself......that I should never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own."

(3) "All poetry should have a local habitation when at all possible."
—(*Letters of 1890*).

(4) "We should make poems and the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and glittering ones we wonder at."

(5) He declared in 1897 : "Blake was a symbolist who had to invent his own symbols......He was a man crying out for a mythology, and trying to make one because he could not find one to his hand ; had he been a scholar of our time he would have gone to Ireland."

(6) *In the Celtic Twilight*, he said : "Folk-art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and the pretty, as certainly as

the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted. Wherever it is spoken by the fireside, or sung by the roadside, or carved upon the lintel, appreciation of the arts that a single mind gives unity and design to, spreads quickly when its hour is come."

So Yeats chose Irish mythology and folklore as the subjects of his poetry. Many reasons have been attributed to his depiction of mythologies. In childhood he had stayed for most of the time in a beautiful landscape of Ireland. His maternal grand-parents and his mother had great interest in Irish folklore. His aunt used to narrate many a fairy-tale. O'Leary's influence and Maud Gonne's inspiration, and his active involvement in Irish nationalism also strengthened his beliefs and convictions about the importance of the legendary past of his country. Not only by birth and breeding but also by temperament, Yeats's love for Irishry seems natural. Ireland is a country where the ghosts linger with a persistence race ; there are many places in the countryside where the dead emigrate, but the dead stay on. Unlike people in Britain, the Irish with their faith in spirits, fairies and folklore are 'physically and mentally sound ; it is the least collectivized, least industrialized country in Western Europe, and unlike England it has not much of middle-class." "Tradition in Ireland is that the gods were there before the Gods came, that they fought for their possession of the country and at last came to terms and withdrew into the hills, leaving the surface of the land to the invaders. And before the gods there were darker powers, some of whom still survive. However that may be, the land is alive with spirits who are known and respected. Their deeds in different places are remembered ; history trails away into myth and myth is projected forward in history. There are fairy hills, green terraced mounds into which no farmer will drive a ploughshare. The fairies are seldom talked of, and most seldom by that name for fear of drawing their attention to the speaker."—(A. G. Stock). Born and brought up in such a land, Yeats very naturally made Irish mythology and folklore a source of inspiration and application.

The mythology which Yeats used extensively in his early poems was the great body of Gaelic heroic legend which had been represented to English readers of the late eighteenth century in the faked-prose 'epics' of Ossian by the Scottish schoolmaster Macpherson, and which was available for a young poet a hundred years later in the more scholarly and authentic versions published by Standish O'Grady and Douglas Hyde. This mythology had never been wholly forgotten in Ireland and for the young Yeats it had the fascination that Greek mythology had for the men of the Renaissance. For him it was no mere antiquarianism, but something which he wholly absorbed and made part of his imaginative life, as Milton absorbed the Hebrew sagas and Keats the Greek myths. "Might I not," he wrote, "with health and good luck to aid me, create some new *Prometheus*

Unbound, Patrick or Columbkell, Oisin or Finn in Prometheus's stead, and instead of Caucasus, Cro-Patrick or Ben Bulpen ?" This ambition to treat heroic themes on a large scale was very different from the contemporary English poets, especially those of the Rhymers Group.

Yeats himself believed in the existence of fairies and ghosts. He did believe that Ballisodore was visited by the spirits and fairies and that whenever he went to their cottages, he was in the lookout for supernatural beings or happenings. His conversations with Mary Battle, his uncle's housekeeper, he admits in the *Celtic Twilight*, confirmed his beliefs. He very much advocated for the element of imagination and the visionary in poetry : "All the folk-literature and all literature that keeps the folk-tradition, delights in the Irish folk-tale had the passion of victory, and he overcame all men, and died warring upon the waves, because they alone had the strength to overcome him. The lover in the Irish folk-song bids his beloved come with him into the woods, and see the salmon leap in the rivers, and hear the cuckoo sing, because death will never find them in the heart of the woods. Oisin, now come from his three hundred years of fairyland, and of the love that is in fairyland, bids Saint Patrick cease his prayers awhile and listen to the blackbird, because it is the blackbird of Derrycarn that Finn brought from Norway three hundred years before, and sets its nest upon the oak tree with his own hands."—(*Essay and Introductions*, p. 179).

Whereas the modern literature lacked passion, ancient Irish literature had a lot of it along with rich imagination and melancholy. The Irish people, by and large, appreciated those stories which had melancholy and death. Moreover, Yeats believed that if a literature was not imbued with passion and ancient beliefs, it would degenerate into a 'Chronicle or circumstances or passionless fantasies.' The Irish literature "infused life into European literature. The framework of the *Divine Comedy* has been borrowed from the Celtic material. The Arthurian Legends, his Round Table and the Holy Grail and a variety of Gaelic legends transformed European Literature and enthused it with a strength and spirit." Some of the famous tales are "—the tale of Deirdre, who alone among women have set men mad with equal loveliness and wisdom ; the tale of the sons of Tuireann, with its intelligible mysteries, an old Grail Quest as I think ; the tale of the four children changed into four swans, and lamenting over many waters ; the tale of love of Cuchulain for an immortal goddess, and his coming home to a mortal woman in the end ; the tale of his many battles at the ford with that dear friend he kissed before the battles, and over whose dead body he wept when he had killed him ; the tale of his death and of the lamentations of Emer ; the tale of the flight of Grania with Diarmud, strangest of all tales of the fickleness of woman, and the tale of the coming of Oisin out of fairyland of his memories and lamentations "—(Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, p. 186). That is why most important characters of the Irish literature—Cassandra, Helen, Deirdre, Lear, Trisham, Oisin, Cuchulain, etc., reappear and figure on the pages of Yeats.

Very early in his career Yeats attempted to treat Irish legendary material on a large scale. *The Wanderings of Oisin* is a long romantic narrative poem full of echoes of Morris, Shelley, Coleridge, Keats and Sir Samuel Ferguson. Yet the mythology of Niamb and Angus, the Fenians and the Danaans is fresh and has 'the beauty and wonder of altogether new things.' In the first part, Oisin is playing about and going a-hunting, when Niamh, daughter of a legendary king, entices him to accompany her to her place, where only the youthful live. With this "pearl-pale, high-born" lady he lives for a hundred years in a land where broken faith has never been known before coming over to this land, his eyes grow dim with tears. This is a breach of the country's laws and he has to leave it. In the second voyage during which he is accompanied by Niamh, Oisin, thrust out from the Kingdom of Joy, is a pale copy of Hyperion. In the third voyage he comes upon an island (evidently Ireland) where he meets 'a monstrous slumbering folk.' Niamh and her husband halt near the king of these people, and ask him his story. Oisin after hearing the story decides to act on behalf of these people, but finds that he has become old and is therefore useless.

The same theme is treated dramatically in the short play called *The Land of Heart's Desire* where the conflict is placed in a peasant setting. The struggle for the soul of the girl Mary Bruin is a tragic theme because it is a struggle between two powers both of which are respected by the poet. The delicate clear music of the famous faery-song in this play is the work of a great lyric poet :

> "The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
> The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
> And the lonely of heart is withered away."

In his *Land of Heart's Desire,* Yeats uses folk-material. He posed the situation of an otherwise happily placed young beauty who cannot resist the desire to go away to the land of the fairies, because she is on the lookout for a world which is neither here nor there. Maud's dissatisfaction with life appeared to be equally and incurably romantic.

In *The Land of Heart's Desire*, the rural world of Irish peasantry is made to fuse with the popular belief in spiritual presences. In *Countess Cathleen* he reveals the supernaturalism prevailing among the Irish folk where the Countess has to sell her soul to receive back the cheap soul of a number of people of her family.

In his "Rose" poems also, he longs to see the working of the Rose in the legends of Celtic mythology. In particular, he would like to see its hand in the Cuchulain legend and the religious rites of the Druids. *Cuchulain's Flight with the Sea* is an important handling of legendary material. When Cuchulain was returning from some battle after victory, his wife Emer was told that with him was coming a beautiful beloved of him. Jealousy rose in the queen's heart. She asked her son to go and fight with the king, his father. Battle followed without the father knowing the reality. The father (Cuchulain) knew too late that he had put his son to death. He was very sad. He could not be consoled. So Conchubar, 'the subtlest of all men', asked his Druids to put delusions in the king's mind, so that he may fight the horses of the Sea, instead of slaying his own men in fury. The Druids did their job.

In the *Island of Statues*, a shepherd and shepherdess overcome an enchantress on an island and find the flower which will restore to life those whom she has turned into statues. *The Stolen Child* portrays the dream of fairyland. *The Rose of the World* invites appreciation by its merging of two traditions in the Helen-Deirdre image. There are a number of other poems which treat mythology and folklore.

In this connection, Peter Ure has made the following observations :

"*The Wanderings of Oisin* and *The Countess Cathleen* both derived from Yeats's decision, which was taken quite deliberately when he was about twenty, to make himself an Irish poet. He went to ancient mythology for *The Wanderings of Oisin* and to a supposedly Irish folk-tale for *The Countess Cathleen*, and drew as well upon the same type of material for its immediate successor, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) ; these were the two principal sources at which the Irish imagination might strengthen itself by drinking at the fountains of its youth and the traditions kept alive amongst the people. In the reviews which he wrote for American journals between 1887 and 1892, he insisted that Irish writers must stick to Irish subject-matter—"We peer over the wall at our neighbour's instead of making our own garden fresh and beautiful," and that they must get to know the literature of the imaginative periods of Irish history. When folk-tales and the speech of the Irish peasants are reported, the bad nineteenth-century tradition of steeping everything in a kind of stage, Irish in order, to gratify the expectations of the foreign reader must be abandoned. Yeats read very widely for his three anthologies of nineteenth-century Irish literature—*Fairy and Folk-Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), *Stories from Carleton* (1889), and *Representative Irish Tales* (1891). He found much to admire in a humour whose essence was daredevilry and harum-scarum gentility and in the pathos and "gentle Arcadian beauty" of the folk-tales of Crofton Croker whose *Fairy Legends and Traditions* (1825) was the first of numerous later collections of folklore. But both the novelists and the folklorists were, in Yeats's view, injured by their narrow conception of Irish life ; in Croker's hands, the *Sidhe*, the gods of the earth, "dwindled to dancing mannikins", in the works of Lover or Lever, the stage Irishman is substituted for the serious passions and convictions of the true peasant ; and even Carleton, the great novelist of Ireland, "like the animals in Milton, half-emerged from the earth and its brooding," was forced "to write for a class who wished to laugh a great deal, and who did not mind weeping a little, provided he allowed them always to keep their sense of superiority."

"Upon the anthologies ensued not only *Oisin* and *Kathleen* but Yeats's own collection of folklore *The Celtic Twilight* (1893, revised and enlarged 1902), many literary currents, the work of the translators of mythological literature, of Standish O'Grady, Samuel Ferguson, Douglas Hyde, and the inspiration of the Fenian leader, John O'Leary, with whom Yeats was very closely associated, flowed in favour of the movement to go down amongst the people and listen to what they had to say. But for Yeats, behind all this overt policy and exercising a deeper constraint, lay the landscape of his Sligo childhood and the country stories of Middletons, the spirit at Roses that looked like a flat-iron, and Mary Battle, his Sligo uncle's servant who had the second right, "Much of my *Celtic Twilight* is but her daily speech." Most of the pieces began as sketches for periodicals, and the book presents no grand design. But besides being a collection of folk-stories and superstitions it is a chapter of autobiography. Interwoven with these elements is a third ; visionary meditation on the stories and places, so that we feel throughout the book the constant pressure of Yeats's impulse to transcend his folk-tale material : "to show in *a vision* samething of the face of Ireland." It is not "systematical and learned," as Douglas Hyde's admired collection *Beside the Fire* (1891) had been, but "a handful of dreams" :

> "The voices melted into the twilight, and were mixed into the trees, and when I thought of the words they too melted away, and were mixed with the generations of men. Now it was a phrase, now it was an attitude of mind, an emotional form, that had carried my memory to elder verses, or even to forgotten mythologies. I was carried so far that it was as though I came to one of the four rivers, and followed it under the wall of Paradise to the roots of the Trees of Knowledge and of Life. —(*Mythologies*, London, 1937, p. 138).

Three sections that follow one upon another may illustrate the method. "Village Ghosts" is a plain collection of little anecdotes, some with the sort of humour, some with that *fricson* that characterizes Yeats's best stories of the sort, all told detachedly and inconclusively. "A Knight of the Sheep," its title suggested by Gerald Griffin's tale which had been included in *Representative Irish Tales*, is about Katherine Tynan's father the "strong farmer", and is a silver from the nineteenth-century novelist's tradition. In between these two, "Dust hath closed Helen's Eye" presents the image that was made permanent in the second part of "The Tower", of Thoor Ballylee, Mary Hynes, and Raftery :

> "Some few remembered still when I was young
> A peasant-girl commended by a song."

Here the old, poor, half-blind poet, the "handsomest girl in Ireland,"

and the landscape of Ballylee are linked with the mythology of Troy and wrought into a symbol of the "sorrow of beauty and of the magnificence and penury of dreams." Yeats begins with the remembered fragments of peasant talk and local wonder, the imaginative care for the past residing in humble description, and ascends from them, out of the "soul where all great art is rooted," into fable. "Dust hath closed Helen's Eye" is written, as nearly twenty years later as *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, for "some country where all classes share in a half-mythological, half-philosophical folk-belief which the writer and his small audience lift into a new subtlety." All his life Yeats longed for such a country. The principle at work in *The Celtic Twilight* and its companion-piece, *The Land of Heart's Desire* is clearly stated in one of the earliest reviews."

Thus, to trace in order Yeats's various attempts to find a satisfying mythology would be almost to give a complete history of his poetic development. Underlying idea of his theory of the 'Celtic Twilight' is the realization—that poetry has lost its contact with religion : its images no longer express man's deepest thoughts about his own nature and own destiny. Industrial civilization has destroyed his relation with the natural world ; and science and Puritanism has vitiated his relations with the unseen. He puts forward his ideas :

> "I will put this differently and say that literature dwindles to a mere chronicle of circumstance, or passionless phantasies, and passionless meditations, unless it is constantly flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times in Europe, the Sclavonic, the Finnish, the Scandinavian and the Celtic, the Celtic alone has been for centuries close to the main river of European literature. It has again and again brought 'the vivifying spirit of excess' into the arts of Europe." —*Essays* (1924), p. 474.

To Yeats, therefore, the Celtic tradition of mythology and folklore offered an escape from the modern impasse, a tap-root by which the arts can regain their sources of primitive energy.

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16 YEATS'S OCCULTISM, PHILOSOPHY AND ESOTERIC DOCTRINE

Yeats's system of philosophy is a curious mixture of philosophy, mythology, magic, alchemy, occultism and symbolism. Yeats's generation grew up in a world where the great conflict was between the Religion of Reason and Religion of Imagination, objective truth and subjective truth, the Universal and the Individual. Yeats also passed through this struggle. Before he comes to the conclusion that a proportionate union of both the elements would do best, he is seen falling this side or that side. Thus, if we find Yeats adopting a cosmology apparently on purely aesthetic grounds, we should not be surprised, for he seems to have adopted it not becouse it was true but because it was interesting and fascinating.

Young Yeats read Darwin and Huxley and accepted them as "established authority". But upon considerations he saw that their beliefs contravened his imagination ; and he could not accept as doctrines their assumptions and methods. He broke away from the rationalism and the intellectualism of his father and probed into the secret and the mysterious. While others lauded 'progress', he turned to that kind of traditionary primitivism which supposed central insights into human nature to occur more easily at the beginnings of a culture than at the end of culture or at the end of civilization.

Yeats's early traffic with ghosts, sorcerers, and fairies was, probably, instigated by a desire to loosen the bonds of logic. In his essays on "Demonology", Emerson speaks of the great interest which dreams, animal magnetism, and omens have for some minds. They run into the twilight and say, "There's more here than is dreamed of in your philosophy." Young Yeats was surely one of these "minds" ; he desired to say : Life is not all rule, order, system, common-sense ; nature and the human mind have their "night-side" of the subconscious of dusk and half-lights. Religion he saw as the search for the irrational, the irruptive, the unpredictable. But, without exaggerating the antithesis, one may represent the later Yeats as finding his own logic and order in the supernatural.

Yeats's deep love and predilection for occultism became intensified through his love and knowledge of theosophy and orientalism. It was further accentuated by the general wave for semi-mysticism which had engulfed Europe and America. The major influences that helped Yeats's occult development were his studies—A. P. Sinnett's *The Occult World,* Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* Max Muller's Work on East, Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled,* and *The Secret Doctrine*, and the work of the Theosophists in England and Ireland, and the personality of Mathers.

Nonetheless the main forces that shaped Yeats's occultism were—(1) George Russell who created in Yeats an interest for magic when he was at the Arts Academy, (2) Madame Blavatsky, (3) Mathers, and (4) the Theosophists. While staying in London, Yeats attended a spiritual meeting and was so much overpowered by the supernatural events that 'he beat his head on the table.' The Theosophists had their interest in magic and the Esoteric section was created for the devout followers to enable them to develop their latent qualities. William Butler Yeats joined the Esoteric section of the Theosophical Society. But he was made to resign from Theosophy by Madame Blavatsky for his reference to experiments. Nevertheless, Theosophy enunciated faith in fairies and ghosts and Yeats became drawn to Boehme and Swedenborg Theosophy also fostered a sense of spiritualism opposed to materialism and deepened his faith in supernatural beings and occultism.

Liddle Mathers' *The Kabbalah Unveiled* was read by Yeats. Mathers introduced Yeats to the Order of Salamanders. Yeats loved occultism and comprehended significance of spiritual world, magic, mysteries and meditation through the Kabbalists too. The Kabbalah presents a cosmogony which has much resemblance to that of Neo-Platonism. The universe is regarded as a series of emanations. The Kabbalah in the nineteenth century became blended with magic and mythology. The Egyptian magic Rosicrucianism wielded spiritual and material power. Yeats's love of symbols and visions has been ascribed to Mathers' influence.

So Yeats is indebted to Kabbalah, Esoteric Buddhism, Neo-Platonism, Occultism and Levi's *The History of Magic* for occultism. From Kabbalah he borrowed the ten Sephiroth which have been combined in various designs The images and symbols of the tree in Yeats's poems and plays have been referred to by Mathers. His association with the Golden Dawn strengthened his belief in the spiritual world.

Through these influences, Yeats became a staunch advocate of the occult and the spiritual. He had a number of visions. Later on his wife too shared the similar belief about occultism and mysteries of the spirit. Yeats put credence into the mysterious happenings. Ultimately, he evolved his philosophy and outlined it in *A Vision*, published in 1925; it was rewritten and the final draft was completed in 1937.

In an essay which he wrote in 1914, and which was finally printed in Lady Gregory's *Visions and Belief in the West of Ireland*, he told how the dead communicate from out of their "earth-resembling" life with the living ; his evidence came not only from Irish ghost-stories and the seance-room but also from the writings of Swedenborg and the Swedenborgians, the Neo-Platonists, the Cambridge Platonists, and the Noh ghost plays. In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (written 1917), which, as a series of supercharged *penses*, is the most successful book of its kind Yeats wrote, he sketches his doctrine of the self and the anti-self ("the Mask"), the notion that each man pursues in pain and desire ("the quarrel with ourselves"), an opposing, imagined self, the reverse of that which operates in his ordinary, daily life. This is the burden of the *poete maudit*, who out of his cursed toil achieves a vision of antithetical beauty and momentary happiness. The roots of the idea lie far back in the symbolist doctrines which Yeats had learnt from Arthur Symons in the eighteen-nineties :

> I find in an old diary : "I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a rebirth as something not one's self, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed......If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves......Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask."[1]

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[1] W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies*, London, 1958, p. 334.

These ideas had turned his work on *The Player Queen* (begun in 1908) into confused allegory, but now they were growing clearer. Finally, a few days later after their marriage Mrs. Yeats, Georgie Hyde-Lees, who was exactly half of Yeats's age of fifty-two, and whom he had initiated into the Order of the Golden Dawn in 1904, attempted automatic writing : the messages which excited him so much that he began to construct the system which resulted in *A Vision* (1925, and a much revised version in 1937). "*A Vision* presents his philosophy of history, human-kind, and life after death. What the "Unknown Instructors" who spoke through Mrs. Yeats told him was a literalization of his own thoughts and beliefs : the classification of historical periods of men and women according to a scheme symbolized by the twenty-eight phases of the moon, and the working of the gyres in history. History becomes a system of antithetical movements diagrammatized by the gyre, or spiral, traced round an imaginary core from apex to base : when the base is reached and the gyre is at its widest, the civilization collapses in a violent reversal and the new gyre begins again at the narrow apex of the cone."[1] In *A Vision* also, he sets out in detail and with much technical language what happens to the dead : the soul endures an elaborate purgatory in which it purifies away in thought the events of its past life until it is ready to be born again :

"Knowledge he shall unwind
Through victories of the mind,
Till, clambering at the cradle-side,
He Dreams himself his mother's pride,
All knowledge lost in trance
Of sweeter ignorance."[2]

The deterministic world of *A Vision* has no God, but natural and supernatural interpenetrate, and men are continually exposed to "shock" and "miracle". The classification according to the phases of the moon was a vast metaphor, "a stylistic arrangement of experience." The point of it all was "getting one's mind into order" and so allowing freedom to the impulse to create.

"In the final form," says A. G. Stock, "*A Vision* amounts to a summing-up of Yeats's own sense of values in a system of thought about the soul in and beyond life, and also about the meaning of history, all worked out in a geometrical symbolism, based on the esoteric doctrines in which he and his wife had both become adepts. It is coherent but not simple. The general lines are easy enough to grasp, but innumerable details branch out from them and fly away in mazy patterns."

Yeats says that any complex movement of life or thought may be seen in these terms ; a single sustained action, a life, a series of incarnations, the universe itself so far as the mind can grasp it. The idea is presented in a diagram 'of the Great Wheel', which represents the Platonic year or the '*Kalpa*' in Hindu mythology. It is in the likeness of the Moon, with its twenty-eight phases clearly marked. The phases represent the total number of the basic types of personality, each arranged on the wheel opposite its 'mask' or anti-self. Out of these, two phases, *i. e.*, phase one (dark moon) and phase fifteen (full moon) constitute pure types, which no human being could represent. The remaining types are broadly divided into primary or solar and anti-thetical or lunar type, which Jung has described as extrovert and introvert types. The Great Wheel also represents "the twenty-eight phases of each cycle of the world history."

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[1] **Peter Ure, *Yeats*, London, 1963, p. 11.**

[2] **W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems*, p. 255.**

Likewise men have been divided into objective and subjective, but a person is mainly either objective or subjective. The gyres are divided into primary and antithetical. The primary gyre stands for the physical characteristics whereas the latter for the spiritual. Yeats elucidates his principle of mask with the help of gyres. He wrote in 1909, "I think, that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed." Again, "If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and try to assume the second self, we cannot impose discipline upon ourselves......Active virtue, therfore, is theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask." This wearing of mask, "this second self" is important. While torn within, despite frustrations and disappointments, one must still wear a smiling face and do his duty. In Yeats's poetry two types of men constantly appear and reappear. One is a lonely visionary and the other is "a half-devilish, half-ascetic figure" delighting in the senses and together they represent the two antithetical aspects of the poet's personality. The antithesis between the real and the ideal, the body and the soul, the self and the anti-self, the recluse and the man of action, runs through all but the earliest poetry of Yeats, and is the result of his theory of 'masks.' This theory enabled him to break himself into ten different personalities, heroes of the myth, the figures of life and letters, Spenser, Goldsmith, Swift, or Timon and Lear ; or Crazy Jane or Fool and Saint, etc.

Yeats further explicates his principle of the classification of a personality with the help of a wheel in his *A Vision*. The twenty-eight spokes of the wheel denote twenty-eight phases of the Moon, representing the twenty-eight types of personality. The human soul passes through twenty-eight phases in one's life-time. These twenty-eight spokes also suggest twenty-eight incarnations, 'and the twenty-eight basic phases of each cycle of world history.' Phase one is the Birth of Christ, two is the Second Coming. He himself belonged to phase seventeen and so did Landor, Dante and Shelley.

Yeats also envisaged four divisions of soul—'Will', 'Mask', 'Creative Mind', and 'The Body of Fate'. The Will is sheer vital energy, the drive towards self-realization. It sets before itself an image, shaped from moments of exaltation in past lives, of all it can conceive as most admirable, all that is most opposite to its actual incarnate self, and strives towards that. That image is the Mask; and, thus, through Will and Mask the soul moulds itself from within.

The Creative Mind is a kind of memory of ideas, or general principles, learnt in past lives, and is the power of thought which is inborn. Its purpose is to understand all circumstances that affect it from the outer world, and the sum of these is the Body of Fate. Body of Fate is the physical and mental environment, the changing human body, the stream of phenomena as this affects a particular individual, all that is forced upon us from without : Time as it affects sensation.

Yeats believed that the civilization moved from the objective to the subjective directions. Christ's Age stands for Objectivity while Renaissance for Subjectivity. He also believed, for example, that the Greek civilization was born out of the forced union of Zeus, as a Swan and Leda, which resulted in the birth of Helen, whose beauty set the city of Troy on fire. This is the theme of his *Leda on the Swan*. Similarly, the Christian civilization, antithetical to the classical one, was engendered in the union of the Dove and the Virgin Mary. This civilization, he believed, was almost at the end of its allotted span and a new Annunciation was brewing in the offing. This is the subject of his *Second Coming* :

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer ;
Things fall apart ; the centre cannot hold ;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned ;
The best lack all convictions, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity,
Surely some revelation is at hand :
......Somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gazy blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow things, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
And what rough beast; its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born ?"

Yeats himself has explained at length this historical process of death and rebirth as it is symbolized in his interlocked cones :

> "...........the end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of the greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction. At the present moment of the life gyre is sweeping onward, unlike that before

the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached the greatest expansion. The revelation, which approaches, will, however, take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre. The future civilization will be 'hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical' as the Christian era has been 'dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane peace, its means and end."

In the emblem of the two interlocked cones, Yeats has represented the basic duality of everything in the world, the perpetual war going on between two opposite forces in the individual as well as in the universe, a conflict which ends only with death. In life, however, a momentary reconciliation is possible, in the union of the male and the female in the sexual act ; in dances where the man is inseparable from his art ; in poetry and other works of imagination where heart and head, abstract and concrete, sense and spirit are blended and a static order is established out of the flux.

As a critic has stated, "Yeats has developed his esoteric doctrine and system. His innovations gave him a technique which was fundamental. It provided him with 'metaphors of poetry'. Yeats used metaphors in his poems and plays after *A Vision.* In poems entitled *The Wild Swans at Coole, Michael Robartes and the Dancer, The Phases of the Moon*, *An Irishman Foresees His Death*, and *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*, Yeats used metaphors and philosophy envisaged in *A Vision.*" Some other poems which make a use of the philososphy of *A Vision* are '*Shepherd and Goatherd*', '*Phases of the Moon*', '*All Soul's Night*', *etc.*

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17. A GENERAL ESTIMATE OF YEATS AS A POET

Yeats's Greatness

W. B. Yeats is regarded as a major English poet of this age. Critics have no hesitation in placing him higher than T. S. Eliot, not because of the bulk and length of his poetic career but because of the quality of his poetry which passes through various phases of development and maturity and his contribution to English poetry. J. W. Beach calls him the finest of the British poets of the modern age, and Edith Sitwell writes of him and his poetry : "It is forty years since the earliest of the great poems gave new life to the language, and today they spring into our consciousness anew, as if we heard them for the first time ; and the wonders and splendours of the latest poems are even greater, since they have grown from a deeper wisdom, a more universal experiment." The development of his poetry never stopped, because his receptivity to events and ideas was continuous. "Contradictions run through his work from beginning to end. The romantic ego appears, disappears and returns in a new shape ; myths are adopted, broken, recombined and again melted down in the fire of feeling. Yeats wore many masks, but was never satisfied with any of them. Like Baudelaire, he was by turns clairvoyant, prophet, fool and dreamer, and it was perhaps his constant unrest that made out of the minor poet of 1908, the greatest figure in English poetry since the death of Tennyson."—(J M. Cohen, *Poetry of This Age*, p. 79). His greatness and his contribution have been analysed and acknowledged by critics like C. M. Bowra, F. A. C. Wilson, V. K. Narayan Menon, Enid Starkie, E. Davis, Richard Ellmann, I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Graham Hough, A. G. Stock, A. N. Jeffares, Peter Ure, and a host of others.

Yeats's work is uniformly good even though he writes on such varied subjects as ancient legend, mythology, folklore, politics, history, love and individual friends and distinct events, and makes new myths of his own. His creative range is immense, he writes with perfect ease and mastery on themes taken from every possible sphere of life, and a high standard of performance is maintained throughout.

Paying a tribute to Yeats in *The Criterion* (July, 1935), T. S. Eliot said : "……it must be apparent that Mr. Yeats has been and is the greatest poet of his time. I can think of no poet, not even among the greatest, who has shown a longer period of development than Yeats." The learned critic regards it as a sign of genius. Indeed, this sustained and continuous development of art and genius is the key-note of Yeats's poetry. The period of poetic activity in his case extended over fifty years, and during this period he was constantly becoming, maturing and growing different from what he was in the beginning. There is no sudden change or break in continuity, but a slow evolution, and the germs of the future are to be found in what has gone before. The seeds that are sown in the earliest phase come to a gradual flowering in his later poetry.

Mysticism

Most of Yeats's poems of the matured period are mystical and therefore complex. A remarkable achievement of Yeats was in the field of masks. He wrote in 1909, "I think, that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self ; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed." At another place he wrote, "Active virtue, therefore, is theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask." This theory enabled him to break himself into ten different personalities, heroes of the myth, the figures of life and letters, Spenser, Goldsmith, Swift, or Timon and Lear, or Crazy Jane or Fool and Saint, etc.

Yeats's theory of the 'mask' is closely related to his philosophical system, which he, like Blake, fabricated as a refuge from the growing pressure of the scientific and materialistic world around him.

In his search for a compensating tradition Yeats went first to romantic literature, and then to mysticism of one kind and another, to folklore, theosophy, spiritualism, Neo-Platonism, and finally elaborated a symbolic system of his own, based on a variety of sources, and in terms of this was able to give pattern and coherence to the expression of his thought. It was a search for a system rather than a search for a set of beliefs ; he sought a mode of expression rather than a set of dogmas to express. The problem for Yeats was not that of finding what he ought to say, his sensitive and restless mind provided him with a constant supply of subjects and attitudes. His problem was that of giving order and proportion to his insights.

"It is a mistake," says David Daiches, "to consider Yeats as a mystic poet. The true mystic is one who seeks to escape from an age of overformulation by repudiating the orthodox categories and seeking identities and correspondences not recognized by more rational speculation. But far from seeking to escape from formulas Yeats is seeking to establish them. He does not wish to escape from orthodox religion but to find a substitute for it. He seeks to impose order, not, as the true mystic does to break down a too neatly ordered system and to get beyond it...He turns to mysticism not in search of shattering new insights but in quest of categories often maintaining a casual scepticism concerning what to the mystics themselves were the essential truth......"

System, order, ritual— these Yeats sought not for their own sake not because as a man he would have chosen to subordinate his mind and body to a traditional discipline, but because he needed them as a poet, to help him achieve adequate poetic expression. Again and again in his autobiographical writings he expressed his wish :

> "I planned a mystical order which should buy or hire the castle......I did not think this philosophy should be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all those things that had moved men most during many, mainly Christian, centuries."

In Yeats's verse a series of ideas recur. They express pride of life, defiance of vulgarity, anxiety about the future, or refusal to accept despair. The only way in which poetry can be philosophical, Yeats brilliantly declared, is by portraying 'the emotions' of a soul dwelling in the presence of certain ideas. Without ideas at all the poet is shallow and sentimental. With ideas gripped tightly as beliefs the poet is gullible, opinionative, and biased, but, with ideas as perches, or habitual surroundings, or, like the elements of symbolic counters, he is made free.

The main ideas found in Yeats's poetry are : reincarnation, the notion that soul passes through round after round of life (Hindu idea of rebirth), interest in imagination ; belief in a heaven attained through love or a heaven attained through drunkenness (like Buddhist salvation) ; belief in the transmutation of the world ; imagery of God or the gods.

Yeats was definitely of the opinion that poetry is a revelation, not a criticism of life, and his study of Blake and deep interest in magic had convinced him that the whole world was only a congery of symbols, which may invoke supernatural reality.

Symbolism and Imagery

William Butler Yeats was a symbolist from the beginning to the end of his career. Arthur Symons is certainly right in his assessment of Yeats as the chief exponent of the Symbolist Movement in England. In the early phase of his career, his symbols are elementary and are no obstacles in the way of the meaning. A number of his early poems are organized round "the rose" symbol, a symbol largely traditional and so easy to understand But as the years passed on, his symbols became complex, personal and complicated. He made use of symbols to convey his inner sensations, his visions and trances, and his mystic experiences which cannot be conveyed in any other way. At their best Yeats's symbols are highly evocative and suggestive. They account for, to a very great extent, the impression of exceptional complexity, richness and intensity produced by his later poetry.

What is remarkable about his symbols and imagery is : first, the diversity of their sources—myth, magic, history, the world and his own personal belongings, such as, the tower he built and the Japanese sword that he had as a gift. His own friends and elders were converted into symbols and placed in company with old heroes and legendary figures ; secondly, the symbols are not only clusters of varied associations, but they also grow, expand and change as they are employed in poem after poem ; thirdly, symbols and images are carefully woven into the pattern of the poem and serve as instruments of integration in one poem and also in the body of his whole work. His several pieces are linked together by a series of symbols, images as with threads of gold and his slightest lyric has a carefully wrought structure, glimmering with flashing images like a piece of shot-silk. His dominant or obsessive symbols are tree, bird, tower, sea, house, mask and rose. The tree became a complex symbol in his poetry. Contemplating time which has transfigured him, he employs 'tree' as a symbol for age, sterility and reality. Yet the tree can sprout again and renew itself, and is thus able 'to spit in the face of time'. Similarly birds suggested to him a host of meanings, speed, lightness, freedom, flight, quickness of intellect ; "they link to artist, since their language is song, to the after life, since the medium which they inhabit is their air : they fly against symbolic sun and moon, nest in the symbolic tree, and hatch symbolic eggs."

The 'sword' is a masculine symbol for life, war, love and sex ; its covering made out of Japanese lady's court dress, is a symbol of body, which, though battered by time, is able to keep 'the untarnished vital principle' still protected. The 'tower' is another complex symbol which glances at Shelley, Milton and Adam, etc., and signifies mental elevation, noble contemplation, permanence of philosophy and art above the flux of life, the loneliness, his own and of all great thinkers, in the world of petty calculators, etc.

Other symbols which abound in his mature poetry are sun, moon, silver, gold, dancer, wheel, gyre, spern, arrow, etc. Their number is legion and implications inexhaustible. They are mostly drawn from Christian, Byzantine, Egyptian, Greek, Theosophical and Magical worlds. But all these 'circus animals' are there to help him depict the human drama which centres round the primary passions of the human heart, passions of life, death, sex, age, Time and Eternity, flesh and spirit, birth and rebirth, violent destruction and the wild joy of recreation. His aim was to root the mythology into the soil and wed the worlds of reality and dream, and his greatness lies in the success which attended his effort. His lyrics have the elements of blood, imagination and intellect, running together ; have all the complex designs of careful artistry with a rich music running through them ; above all, they represent the happy blending of refined and noble expression with the language of the beggar and the peasant. His compact, closely woven style, each word used with calculated effect, lends itself readily to a wide variety of subjects. The deceptive simplicity that is Yeats's at his most subtle is to be seen in the strikingly effective Crazy Jane poems.

Myth-making quality

Cleanth Brooks regards Yeats as a great myth-maker and his *Vision* as 'the most ambitious attempt made by any poet of our time to set up a myth.' Richly gifted with a mythopoeic imagination, Yeats is for ever finding analogies for the present and the personal in the past the impersonal. Thus, he glorifies the present and exalts and imparts the universal significance of a myth. The commonplace, thus, acquires heroic proportions. In the very opening of the *Easter 1916*, for example, we get the myth of Yeats's contemporaries coming out of the dead past to participate in the activity of the present. Yeats invents new myths, uses old ones in changed contexts, or invests them with new significance. Thus in *The Magi* the old Biblical story has been modified and the Magi are transformed to stars looking down at the "bestial floor". In *No Second Troy* and a host of other poems, the old Helen-myth has been infused with unique personal significance. At other times, new myths are created by using fictitious personages as symbols of personal moods and emotions.

W. B. Yeats is a great teller of tales in words. But these are not tales of the men and women living in the artificial and sophisticated atmosphere of towns and cities. The tales that he tells in his poems have the freshness and the dew of naturalness about them as they are the tales which he himself might have heard from the Irish peasants and of which his uncle's maid-servant had a plentiful store which might have been opened to the sensitive young Yeats by the fireside every evening. In his poems we find a very intense local feeling and a vigour of speech and a colour of phrasing unknown to the poets of England The subtle colour and movement of his words have themes of the ballad poetry of the medieval times. At first "he tried to equate Ireland with a Celtic Utopia, a land of beautiful dreams."

Therefore, the Irish tales of the earlier period as also to some extent those of the middle are tremulous with the beauty of a supernatural world and the magical music lavished upon it.

Nationalism and Patriotism

When Yeats began to write, the Irish movement for liberation was going on, and Yeats could not keep himself cut off from the politics of his day. He was in sympathy with the movement in as much as it might give Ireland more opportunities for self-expression. In the beginning, his nationalism was orthodox and romantic. In his middle years experience of public life and politics disillusioned him. "The kind of nationalism which he admired, represented by John O'Leary, was in a decline. The Nationalism dominant seemed to him to involve a shocking waste of energy and to have ruined the lives of a number of his friends......Ireland now seemed the enemy rather than the patroness of poetry—"the seeming needs of my fool-driven land." During this period of disillusionment, Yeats met Lady Gregory and J. M Synge who restored to him the Ireland of his childhood. Lady Gregory once more revived his admiration for the Anglo-Irish land-owners. Synge strengthened his old admiration for the Irish peasantry but under a new source of inspiration Synge brought home to him the value of "all that heightens the emotions by contest, all that stings into life the sense of tragedy." From this time onward Yeats's poetry shows far more recognition of the physical man. But in the middle period after his campaigning with Maud Gonne, he had come to feel that they were stoking a dead fire. In 1913, he deplored the lack of daring and imagination in contemporary Ireland.

"Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave."

The *Easter* uprising in 1916, the heroes of which were Pearce and Connolly, was followed by the shooting of the sixteen eminent leaders by the English, and Yeats sang—

"Was it needless death after all."

Yet Yeats was in full sympathy with the cause of the martyrs.

"A conscious and truth-loving mind, Yeats is a penetrating analyst. He looses the complex to temperaments and the complexities of values through the suppleness of his intuitions, he disentangles and classifies their shades by means of his judgments, and one whole side of his nature makes him akin to the school of critics moulded by the influence of the Elizabethans. His varied work will probably live, if enfranchised Ireland should give birth to an original literature, as a distinguished blending of the national spirit with British and European culture: as a transition between the literary ideal of yesterday, and that of tomorrow......"—(Legouis and Cazamian).

Yeats's Craftsmanship

Yeats gave to English poetry animating rhythms. He was a great metrist who experimented with a variety of stanzas and verse-forms. He kept away from the *verse libra* and other technical innovations of his day, but he used the traditional metres and stanza-forms with consummate skill. He freed the English lyric from the tyranny of the Iambic, and manipulated the stress, pause and cadence of the long line with great mastery and self-confidence. The octosyllabic couplet he made particularly his own and brought out its full colloquial possibilities. He had a Donne-like command over stanza-structures and made his stanza-patterns correspond with the movement of thought and emotion. The sudden shifts in tone and mood, often within the same line, further indicate Yeats's affinity with Donne and his school.

Yeats's Shortcomings

Although Yeats's poetry has its own specialities and qualities of permanence, it has some glaring shortcomings too. According to Zabel, Yeats's work undoubtedly lacks a fully convincing "architectonic" (to revive Arnold's word for it) quality, a consistent and an applicable structure of belief and reference. F. R. Leavis has noted in *The Last Poems*—an inferiority of organization, a weakening of the positives of "sensual music" and "monuments of unaging intellect" that created the subtle and majestic tension of *Sailing to Byzantium*. W. H. Auden criticizes Yeats for his utter lack of effort to relate his aesthetic effort with the scientific effort. It has been pointed out that the tone of the poetry of the Last Phase is one of despair and grief. Even a great critic like I A. Richards finds it a total rejection of life. D S. Savage finds in his poetry "the repeated use of hyperbolic phrases and of resounding words whose effect is to inflate the meaning." Closely allied with, and akin to this hyperbolism is Yeats's habit of self-dramatization, his dandyism, and his exaggerated emotionalism. His imagery is not drawn from modern life. As regards the later poetry, there seems to be no human mean between the supernatural and the bestial, the inhuman purity of the moon and the animal ragings of the blood. C. M. Bowra sees a fall in the artist's powers in Yeats's last poem.

Yeats's Place and Permanence

Despite these shortcomings, Yeats has attained a significant place in the history of English poetry by his creative gifts. He had not only genius and great creative powers at his disposal, but also the inner conviction, wisdom and necessary craftsmanship of a true poet. He may not be a Shakespeare or a Milton, a Homer or a Dante, but he has permanence and universality of an order which may be ranked just below the highest and the greatest. Fraser assesses Yeats in this manner : "So, on the whole, I am ready to risk rashness, and to claim for Yeats the position of a major English poet, ranking with Donne, with Milton and with Wordsworth in the great succession. I think he is very much greater than Browning or Tennyson or Arnold, and as I have said, he has possibly more lasting qualities than poets like Pound or Eliot, who have for us today with our particular problems of a megalopolitan society, a more urgent topical appeal.

One tests this sort of things by personal experience ; I bought Yeats's collected poems when I was in my teens. I carried them with me through my university days and through the war. I have them now : and I find that I turn to them again and again for a kind of reassurance, a stimulation, a general keying up of my responses, which I can get from no other contemporary source."

18. SELECTED LITERARY OPINIONS ON YEATS'S POETRY

(I)

T. S. Eliot on the Later Poetry of Yeats

Certainly, for the younger poets of England and America, I am sure that their admiration for Yeats's poetry has been wholly good. His idiom was too different for there to be any danger of imitation, his opinion was too different to flatter and confirm their prejudices. It was good for them to have the spectacle of an unquestionably great living poet, whose style they were not tempered to echo and whose ideas contracted those in vogue among them......Art was greater than the artist ; and this feeling he communicated to others ; which was why younger men were never ill-at-ease in his company... . Yeats is pre-eminently the poet of the middle age . ...he was one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them. This is a very high position to assign to him ; but I believe that is one which is secure. —"*The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*," June, 1940.

(II)

W. H. Auden on Yeats's Cosmology and his Concern with the Occult

Yeats's generation grew up in a world where the great conflict was between the Religion of Reason and the Religion of Imagination, Objective truth and Subjective truth, the Universal and the Individual.

Further, Reason, Science, and the general, seemed to be winning, and Imagination, Art, and the individual on the defensive. Now in all conflicts it is the side which takes the offensive that defines the issues which their opponents have to defend......

Thus, if we found Yeats adopting a cosmology apparently on purely aesthetic grounds, *i. e.*, not because it is true but because it is interesting or......he knows, too, that in poetry all dogmas become myths ; that the aesthetic value of the poem is the same whether the poet or the reader actively believes what it says or not. He is apt then to look around for some myth—any myth, he thinks, will do—to serve the same purpose for himself. What he overlooks is that the only kind of myth which will do for him must have one thing in common with believed dogma, namely, that the relation of the former to the poet, as of the latter to the soul, must be a personal one. The Celtic legends Yeats used woven into his childhood—he really went to sciences, he seriously, studied all those absurd books...... —"*Yeats as an Example*", 1948.

(III)

M. D. Zabel

......Yeats's work undoutedly lacks a full convincing "architectonic" (to revive Arnold's word for it) quality, a consistent and an applicable structure of belief and reference The structure it has often appears personal, proned and imperative......He was aesthetic in his origins and temperament......Yet it is a sign of Yeats's real capacities that he knew he had to grow from sensation to emotion, from reveries to thought, from passivity to action, from aestheticism to art ; and the growth is as much marked by intention as by natural or instinctive process. The growth was personal, sensible, moral, before it was anything else—historical, philosophical, critical. To deprive it of reality or seriousness is to set up a paradox between Yeats's character and his poetry that admits no solution. If the poetry is real, sound, and true, the experience and "thinking" out of which it issued must—for him—be so likewise ; and if they are not, it is not.

......Yeats's realities are the realities of our human capacity for vitality and sincerity. His resonance is that of the poetic integrity, whose imagination includes philosophy. If the framework of his thought and images deprives him, through its specialized symbolism, of taking a place among the very greatest poets, it nevertheless establishes him as a poet pre-eminent in modern times for his sense of moral wholeness of humanity and history......

Yeats's long life and achievement have not lacked recognition during the past twenty years, but it seems to be the thing once more to hold his career in renewed skepticism, to discount his struggle with modern life, and to diminish his spiritual ordeal to "the quarrel he made with himself." He is written down as an exotic by-product of the major European tradition. His peak war reached in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, and Mr. F. R. Leavis was right in noting in *The Last Poems* an inferiority of organization, a weakening of the positives of "sensual music" and "monuments of unaging intellect" that created the subtle and majestic tension of *Sailing to Byzantium.* But even he underestimated the fact that Yeats wrote for over a decade after that poem's appearance and was constitutionally unwilling to make it an end-stop of his art or to accept the common definition of the moment in life at which organization should be permanently established. What is more confusing is that this skepticism has shifted from Yeats's artistry and thought to his character. Mr. Auden, reducing Yeats's gift to one of diction and word-magic ("always more concerned with whether or not a phrase sounded effective than with the truth of its idea or the honesty of its emotion") and impunging his sincerity for an "utter lack of effort to relate his aesthetic *weltanschaung* with that of science," has denied him the refuge of self-hood itself, that "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" to which the desertion of his masks and legends finally abandoned him. Mr. MacNeice, reviving the notion that the Public considered Yeats, "safe because he was an exotic" and that "his ingredients become odder and odder," has also emphasized the idea that Yeats's temperament was dominantly histrionic veering between aristocratic sympathies and a 'praise of war" falsely inferred from his envy of "lust and rage," and failing in its reaction against the aesthetic isolation of his youth because of a "constitutional inhumanity." Yeats provoked and survived many such shifts of respect and skepticism in his lifetime. But when the complex integrity of his whole career, his passionate sense of the conflict between art and life, and hard-won insights are thus reduced by moral analysis—when, indeed, we hear of a young English poet's verdict that he was "a bad old man" we begin to feel that his critics are not a thousand miles removed from the musician who once wrote him : "You should have heard my setting of your 'Innisfree' as it was sung in the open here by two thousand Boy Scouts."

......He provided an occasion for learning the meaning of the present moment in history, not from frenzied oracles and spokesmen of righteousness, but from the ordeal and truth of self-knowledge of humanity. This was for Yeats the one genuine source of energy and fortitude, and it saved him from despair when he saw Europe standing at the moment of his death, at the edge of a new disaster :

> "All things fall and are built again,
> And those that build them again are gay."

Yeats took forty years to learn what Lady Gregory meant when she taught him Aristotle's maxim : "To think like a wise man but to express oneself like the common people." It took the long endurance of his troubled and distracted career to justify his epitaph : "Cast a cold eye, on life, on death." When, at the age of sixty, he received from the Swedish Academy the medal of the Nobel Award, he wrote, after the ceremony : "All is over, and I am able to examine my medal......It shows a young man listening to a Muse, who stands young and beautiful with a great lyre in her hand, and I think as I examine it, I was good-looking once like that young man, but by unpractised verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were ; and now I am old and rheumatic, and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young. I am even persuaded that she is like those Angels in Swedenborg's vision, and moves perpetually towards the day-spring of her youth." In 1937, he wrote : "I have recovered a power of moving the common man I had in my youth. The poems I can write now will go into the general memory." A month before his death he wrote : "I do nothing but write verse."

—Yeats : "The Book and the Image,"
The Nation, October 12, 1940.

(IV)

A N. Jeffares on Yeats's Methods of Writing Verse

In common with most poets, Yeats had two main methods of writing verse—the one spontaneous, and the other a laborious process involving much alteration and substitution. What is meant by spontaneous is that Yeats recorded his thoughts in verse once he was aware of their existence, and did not change substantially after his first version of the particular poem in which he had recorded them...... The second type of composition was a much more deliberate and unusual process, and justifies MacNeice's opinion that Yeats "made himself a poet and, as poet, he was essentially a maker." Very many of Yeats's poems were planned in prose drafts which were then made into poems (for example, *Byzantium*)......he was concerned that his reader or hearer should feel that the verse was the spontaneous utterance of the poet. He took pains to hide his methods of poetic creation and to gain the directness and simplicity that is a sign of strength. It is now possible to discover how Yeats did gain his effects. It was ever a maxim of the ancient critics that poetic creation should be understood, and, in examining the methods of a man so gifted as to be termed genius, there must be much of value. Through examining the poet's unpublished writing one comes to a closer understanding of his very unusual personality and mental process, and, in turn, to a deeper understanding of his published works,

—"W. B Yeats and His Methods of Writing Verse."
The Nineteenth Century and After (March, 1946).

(V)

W. B. Tyndall on Yeats's Symbolism

Dedicating his *Symbolist Movements in Literature* to William Butler Yeats, Arthur Symons called his Irish friend "the chief representative of that movement in our country." Symons makes it plain that Yeats belongs not to French Symbolist movement but rather to a general European movement of which the French are leaders. Later critics have been less accurate. C. M. Bowra in his *Heritage of Symbolism* (1943) takes it for granted that Yeats is heir to the French ; and Edmund Wilson in *Axel's Castle* (1931), searching for connections to support his thesis, went so far as to invent a meeting between Yeats and Mallarme. Joseph Hone, also accepting Yeats as an heir to the French, asserts in his *Life of W. Yeats* (1943) that Yeats was familiar with the Herodiade of Villiers de L'Isle Adam, an assertion which would carry more weight if Mallarme had not written it and if Yeats had been familiar with it. These critics, whose confusion suggests only that the matter is confusing, may be forgiven for their desire to impose cause, effect, and order upon something that seems to deny those satisfactions......A man who cannot read Mallarme cannot be affected by Mallarme. But it is unnecessary to look to him or to any Frenchman for the symbolism of William Butler Yeats, who was a symbolist poet long before he had heard of the

French. He based his symbolism upon the occult. In 1886, under the spell of Mme. Blavatsky, Yeats joined the Dublin Lodge of the Theosophical Society, and two years later he joined in London the order of the Golden Dawn, a Rosicrucian and Kabbalistical society, whose leader MacGregor Mathers, maintained connection with the similar order of Stanislas de Guatta in Paris. From the works of Mme. Blavatsky, Yeats learned that *Anima Mundi*, a reservoir of all that has touched mankind, may be evoked by symbols. From Swedenborg he received the doctrine of magical incantations and symbols which have power over spiritual and material reality, and from Boehme the similar doctrine of signatures. The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus informed him that things below are as things above. And the symbolic ritual of the Rosicrucians confirmed these ideas. A rebel against the world of matter, Yeats learned that all material things correspond to concepts in the word of spirit, and that through the use of material objects as magical symbols the adept may call down disembodied powers. The essay "Magic' (1901) expresses his conviction that the great memory of nature can be evoked by symbols. Like Baudelaire, who had read Swedenborg before him, Yeats became a poetic visionary, and like Rimbaud, who had followed Eliphas Levi, Yeats became "a master of magic who through poetic symbols and trances could surprise reality in its lair. Although he had never heard of Baudelair or Rimbaud during his reading of Levi and Swedenborg, Yeats belonged with these poets to the great transcendental movement of the nineteenth century and turned naturally to the same supernatural sources. Material reality which a poet could deal directly with spiritual orders. The example of Blake, also an occultist, taught Yeats the use in poetry of magical symbols ; and the poems of Shelley, which he carefully analysed, confirmed his symbolic system. Like Blake, Baudelaire and Rimbaud Yeats saw the poet as magus and priest but as poet before magus and priest. Knowing what he was about, he went to the occult in the first place to discover, if he could, the laws of the imagination, to find ways of inducing trance and vision through which he could confront the inner and higher realities he needed and to find images or symbols for his poetry.

—"The Symbolism of Yeats", *Accent* V, 4 Summer, 1945.

(VI)

Austin Warren on Yeats's Religion

Yeats needed religion less as a man than as a poet, and his need was epistemological and metaphysical; he needed to believe that poetry is a form of knowledge and power, not of amusement. One might say of the early Yeats that he thought poetry as incantation and meant the word as more than metaphor : of the later Yeats, one would have to say that his metaphors were meant as more than illustrative analogies. Of symbolism, the juncture between religion and poetry, he could never have admitted its "mereness" ; symbols are vehicles as well as intimations. If mathematical and chemical formulas are recipes for the control of matter, images and liturgy have power over minds ; they reach farther and deeper than do abstractions. Men become what they contemplate.

.. ...Young Yeats read Darwin and Huxley and accepted them as "established authority, but upon consideration he saw that their beliefs contravened his imagination ; and he could not accept as doctrines their assumptions and methods. While others lauded 'progress', he turned to that kind of traditionary primitivism which supposes central insights into human nature to occur more easily at the beginning of a culture than at the end of civilization. Like A. E. he was not a university man ; he had indeed a prejudice against meek readers in libraries : and—by reaction as well as chance, doubtless—he sought out first the unprofessional books professing to teach wisdom of life. In search of a philosophy "at once logical and boundless" he read Baron Reichenbach, Boehme, Swedenborg. An "authoritative religion," he decided. "could be assembled from the affirmations of poets— especially Spenser, Blake, and Shelley."

All the cults to which Yeats attached himself vary a single pattern—that of an archaic wisdom traditionally clothed in myth but now, to some groups of initiates, 'unveiled' ; all of them—even Theosophy, the most elaborate of the systems—are inclusive of magic, alchemy, astrology, and spiritualism......

Yeats played with alchemy and its symbolisms. He imagined himself as writing a little work, in the style of Sir Thomas Browne, which should interpret the alchemic Quest as the "transmutation of life into art."......

Until comparatively late, he had restricted his reading to the "poets and the mystics", avoided the philosophers, even the philosophers of mysticism—as though the purity of his intuitive belief might be violated by acquaintance with rival positions and criteria. But now, after making the initial notes for *A Vision*, he reads Plotinus, medieval philosophy, Berkeley, Hegel, Wundt, McTaggart, willing not only to see his own "philosophy" in terms of its historical parallels and oppositions but to make it as coherent as possible ; and he reads biography and especially history with the intent of grounding his myth in the world of secular fact This moment from the Rosicrucians to Plotinus and Berkeley is strikingly paralleled by the increasing comprehensiveness of Yeats's mythic Ireland. Whereas in the *Twilight* and the *Rose* he almost limits himself to the lord of peasants and the "pride of adept", to a pre-Christian, or, failing that, pre-Reformation Ireland. the later Yeats is able to find heroes in the persons of the Anglo-Irish Augustans—Swift, Burke, Goldsmith, and Berkeley—to find Irish philosophy in their writings.

> "And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree,
> That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century
> after century,
> Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality ;

And God-appointed Berkeley that proved all things a dream,
That this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world, its farrow that so solid seem,
Must vanish on the instant if the mind but change its theme."

Yeats's early traffic with ghosts, sorceresses, and fairies was, probably, instigated by a desire to loosen the bonds of logic. In his essay on "Demonology", Emerson speaks of the great interest which dreams, animal magnetism, and omens have for some minds. They run into the twilight and say, "There's more here than is dreamed of in your philosophy." Young Yeats was surely one of these 'minds' ; he desired to say : "Life is not all rule, order, system, common-sense ; nature and the human mind have their 'night-side' of the subconscious, of dusk and half-lights." Religion he saw as the search for the irrational, the irruptive, the unpredictable. But, without exaggerating the antithesis, one may represent the later Yeats as finding its own logic and order in the supernatural.

In all these respects, Yeats may be judged to have matured. In his early traffic with Rosicrucians and Cabbalists, he is disarmingly easy to satirize as the adolescent enamoured of ritual wardrobes, passwords, and "the pride of the adept" ; the self-awareness of the later Yeats is, in the earlier, sometimes theatrical, posed. Yet the maturity is anticipated in certain persistencies—belief in the imagination, balance of sensibility and sense, moral courage. Like the contemporary Irving Babbit, Yeats could stand removed from the current intellectual orthodoxy without losing either his sharp sense of dissent or his own faith. He was not afraid to seem adolescent until he could achieve maturity on something like his own terms and win by steadfast adherence, some respect for his outmoded causes. After 1900, we hear little more of arcane societies ; Yeats turns from planning an occult ecclesiasticism to the organization of an Irish theatre. The occult pursuits consolidate into a general defence of a more variously comprehensive universe than a positivist science will admit.

A central property of Yeats's religion which remains unchanged from youth to age is its lack of a consequent ethics. His old companion is theosophy......But Yeats, so far as one can see, never postulated an ascetical discipline preliminary to a religious experience. He had his moral code, and he had his ritual ; but as in primitive religions, the two were unrelated. Catholic Christianity is mystical, secramental, ethical, and seeks, at whatever tension, to realize this character......

Temperamentally, Yeats seems to have been an optimistic monist. If his magic seems generally "white', if he had no appetite for diabolism or blasphemy, he was correspondingly free from any sense of sin or need of redemption.....

—"William Butler Yeats : The Religion of a Poet."
The Southern Review, VII, 3, 1942.

(VII)

J. W. Beach on the Poetry of Yeats

......The earlier poems are remarkable for their dreamy sweetness and their traditional song-like ballad rhythm, whether they are in ordinary iambics, like *The Song of Wandering Aengus*, or in the more haunting, curiously modulated cadence of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree.* Very little of common life is admitted ; the vocabulary is rather strictly limited to what would suit the general tonality of late-Victorian romanticism, and further limited in the effort to give the effect of Irish folkliterature. In his later poetry, Yeats cultivates subtler, more varied and more dramatically balanced cadences, his vocabulary is greatly enlarged with terms both vernacular and learned. The metaphors are fresher and taken from a vastly wider range of references, and the imaginative structure is both more firmly wrought and more spontaneous and natural in effect. The "metaphysical" has come back, with its artful dissonances and its composition of contrasting tonalities. And the final effect is an enrichment of the early "glamour" with the help of the familiar and the difficult. In all this Yeats has been a leader in that school of writing which includes such names as Eliot, Auden, Ransom, Stevens, Ronal Battral and Dylan Thomas.

His later style begins to show strongly in the 1910 and 1914 volumes in such poems as "No Second Troy", "The Fascination of What's Difficult", and "The Cold Heaven". In 1919, he has completely found his voice as a poet in whom feeling is penetrated with thought, and the imagination is rooted in experience and enriched by reference to a considerable range of assimilated knowledge......

—*A History of English Literature* by Craig, Anderson and Beach.

(VIII)

D. S. Savage on the Poetry of Yeats

......Yeats's development from the poet of a monotonous dreamy twilight to the poet of the harsh and acrid light of day is to some extent involved with his changing attitude towards the supernatural. But basically his view remained the same, the alteration being one of emphasis. As a young man he dreamed and wrote about the inhuman world of faery, and this naturally limited the scope of his art. In middle life, he approached nearer humanity, but because of his views of the separation of the two worlds he wrote poetry of disenchantment, was not able to take human life seriously, and in his old age fell back on the despiritualized natural world and celebrated the brutal sensual life of the blood. There is something inhuman, or soulless about Yeats all the way through......

Other things apart, Yeats is a demonstration of the superficiality of the "romantic-classical" antithesis as commonly applied to poetry. On the surface there has never been a more "romantic" poet than

Yeats, with his self-dramatization, his dandyism, his exaggerated emotionalism (springing from an inner coldness, one thinks of his impossible love and his marriage in middle age) and the rest. As Mr. MacNeice says in his study of Yeats : "......In spite of his romantic genealogy he had a Roman liking for the poet in a formal niche : poets were to be the members of a priesthood, handing down their mysteries to their successors, and conferring with one another when they wished to develop or modify ritual." This is nothing if not retrogressive. The fact that he regarded the poet's function as ideally a public (*i. e.*, impersonal) as one is shown in several of his remarks about his own poetry during his later life, and by his reversion to the "bard" in his ballad-writing on Irish political themes.

We cannot understand Yeats until we realize that his inner attitude was quite static ; his philosophy, his politics, his life and his work were all shaped by this fact. Custom and ceremony are the conditions he exalts when he writes, in *A Prayer for my Daughter*, of the prerequisites of the good life. His "romantic" peculiarities were developed only as a substitute custom which, given him by a different society, a different age, would have proved him indubitably a "classical" artist. Yeats flaunts his "personality", but in reality is an extremely impersonal artist ; his personality is a "mask", a dramatic convenience for the writing of verse ; true personality is not idiosyncratic but anonymous, and does not flaunt itself. Yeats did not place any high value upon the personal qualities and upon human personality itself. He evaded Christianity, which exalts and enshrines the value of human personality (and which brings the supernatural down into the natural), and it is not, therefore, surprising to find that he took great pride in his ancestry, his family, the nation of his birth. The fact that he toyed with fascism in his later years and took a keen interest in eugenics (racial purity) is but another revelation of his anti-personalism. In default of a principle of personal dynamism within himself, and of such a stable classical order and accepted orthodoxy, Yeats assembled a home-made gimcrack order and "religious" system out of the exotic fragments he found here and there beyond the borders of commonplace life; thus his apparent romanticism. An artificer or bard, without a context, without standards he could accept from outside and without an inner spiritual pressure directed upon life, he turned inwards to centre his attention upon art, he became an aesthete, and there resulted the development which is revealed in his work : a development in a vacuum.

—"The Aestheticism of W. B. Yeats,"
The Kenyon Review, VII, I, 1945.

(IX)

Stephen Spender on Yeats's Realism

..... His individuality is emphasized by the romantic line of his development, which is reminiscent of Goethe. He began as the writer of romantic, twilight poetry. Late in life, he is now writing his best poetry, most of which is inspired by contemporary political events, and by the lives of his friend......Like Goethe, the stream of Yeats's romantic poetry was interrupted by his public life. The effect of politics on his writing was revolutionary.

This development, which at first seems unique, was the result of three main influences—the influence on him of certain changes in social life that took place during his life and that of his friends ; the influence of his interest in magic ; the influence on him of symbolist theories of poetry......What one admires in Yeats's poetry is, in fact, not its mystery, its magic or even its atmosphere ; but its passion, its humanity, its occasional marvellous lucidity, its technical mastery, its integrity, its strength, its reality and its opportunism.

Why, then, is this romantic facade at all necessary ? Or, since it exists, why does it not falsify the whole effect ? The answer is that Yeats's poetry is devoid of any unifying moral subject, and it develops in a perpetual search for one. Although he has much wisdom, he offers no philosophy of life, but, as a substitute, magical system, which, where it does not seem rhetorical, is psycho-analytic, but not socially constructive. Reverent as he is, he does not convey any religion ; instead, we are offered, in such poems as *Prayer for My Daughter*, an aristocratic faith. It is illuminating to consider what exactly Yeats does pray for his daughter, because presumably these are the qualities which he considers most important to human being. (1) He wants her to be beautiful, but not too beautiful. (2) Courteous.

—"Yeats as a Realist", *The Criterion*, XIV, I, 1934.

(X)

F. R. Leavis on Yeats

What, then, it might be asked after this account of Mr. Yeats's achievement, is there to complain of ? Does it really show that the traditions in the nineteenth century with advantage have been other than it was ? If he had to struggle with uncongenial circumstances, has not every great artist had to do so ; and did he not, by admission, make triumphs of them ? Mr. Yeats himself gives the answer in the bitter sense of waste he expresses characteristically, in the latest work as elsewhere. His poetry is little more than a marginal comment on the main activities of his life. No one can read his *Autobiographies* and *Essays* without being struck by the magnificent qualities of intelligence and character he exhibits. His insight shows in his analysis of his own case, an analysis that suggests at the same time the complete achievement he was fated to miss. "In literature", he wrote in 1906, "partly from the lack of that spoken word which knits us to the normal man, we have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man—blood, imagination, intellect, running together —but have found a new delight in essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination, in all that comes to us most easily, in elaborate music." Again, by quoting his own verse, he explicitly relates the general reflection to his own case : "Nor did I understand as yet how little that Unity (of Being), however, wisely sought is possible without a Unity of Culture in class or people that is no longer possible at all.

> "The fascination of what's difficult
> Has dried the sap out of my veins and rent
> Spontaneous joy and natural content
> Out of my heart."

At this point it might be commented that Mr. Yeats turned out an unfortunate witness to have called. What he testifies against is not the poetic tradition, but the general state of civilization and culture ; a state which, he contends, makes waste inevitable for the sensitive. But he implies nothing against holding that if the poetic tradition had been different, as it might very well have been, he might have brought more of himself to expression. Writing of the early songs he says significantly : "......the only language that interested him was that conventional language of modern poetry which has begun to make us all weary......" It is true that he successfully dropped this "conversational language of modern poetry" ; but early habits of mind and sensibility are not so easily dropped. The incidental confession he makes in a later poem—

> "I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made
> Amid the dreams of youth—"

has such significance......

—*New Bearings in English Poetry*, 1932.

(XI)

Arthur Mizener on Yeats's Romanticism

The later poetry of Yeats is far finer than the poetry he wrote for the 'nineties, and it is finer because in it he sought to shape life to his heart's desire not merely in fancy but in fact. But it remains the poetry of a man committed to the heart's desire, a romantic poetry. As such it is at once colloquial and orotund, straightforward and full of astounding, "irrelevant" implications. As such, it is full of enthusiastic and crotchety extremes which are forever on the verge of destroying its coherence or statement or its unity of style. It knows neither decorum of idea......This is not the logical, decorous, "neo-classical" poetry so many of Yeats's critics appear to be trying to make it out, and it is not because it rests on that conviction which Hulme, the neo-classicist, was at such pains to deny : that the divine is life at its intensest. Mr. Winter's low opinion of it is a perfectly logical judgment from his point of view, and I do not see how we are to dissent from his account of Yeats's procedure, however much we may disagree with his evaluation of its results. The poetry of *The Tower* is not harder and richer and more logical than the poetry of *The Rose* ; it is only more concrete, more skilful in rhetoric, and more crowded with what Yeats found solid in life. For he might have been speaking of himself when he wrote of the Irish story-teller—

> "His art, too, is often at its greatest when it is most extravagant, for he only feels himself among solid things, among

things with fixed laws and satisfying purposes, when he reshaped the world according to his heart's desire. He understands as well as Blake that the ruins of time build mansions in eternity."—(*Cuchulain in the Muirthemne*, p xiii).

—"The Romanticism of W. B. Yeats,"
The Southern Review, VII, 3, 1942.

(XII)

David Daiches on W. B. Yeats

In his search for a compensating tradition Yeats went first to romantic literature, and then to mysticism of one kind and another, to folklore, theosophy, spiritualism, Neo-Platonism, and finally elaborated a symbolic system of his own, based on a variety of sources, and in terms of this was able to give pattern and coherence to the expression of his thought. It was a search for a system rather than a search for a set of beliefs that he expressed. The problem for Yeats was not that of finding what we ought to say ; his sensitive and restless mind provided him with a constant supply of subjects and attitudes. His problem was that of giving order and proportion to his insights. He did not even seek a point of view, for his mind, so much elastic and all-embracing than Eliot's, would never be satisfied, sought simply adequacy of poetic communication and for that he needed an ordered system to give meaning to his terms, to his individual poems. He did not conceive of this system as demanding the intellectual assent of his readers, though his attempts at prose exposition show that he would have preferred such assent : its function was to be rather that of the weaver weaving his patterns, necessary to those who appreciate the finished product. The analogy is not altogether perfect, for in some cases we do need to know what frame Yeats was using before we can appreciate his finished work. Indeed, there seems to be some confusion in Yeats's conception of the function of his system. Is it a frame for the weaver or a key to be used by the observer in interpreting the pattern right ? In a period of cultural stability such a system would serve both functions, but it would be a system common to writer and reader, and it serves these functions unconsciously. In the modern world, however, the poet who wishes to compensate for the lack of such a tradition has to make up his mind how far the compensation should go. For by attempting too much he may achieve nothing by trying both to help himself to coherence and to supply a background of belief incoherent or by alienating his readers by the privateness of his conceptions.

......"W. B. Yeats......I" reprinted from *Poetry and the Modern World*, 1940.

(XIII)

Allen Tate

Mr. Eliot's view, that Yeats got off the central tradition into a "minor mythology", and Mr. Blackmur's view, that he took "magic" (as opposed to religion) as far as any poet could, seems to me to be related versions of the same fallacy. Which is : that there must be a direct and effective correlation between the previously established truth of the poet's ideas and the value of the poetry. (I am over-simplifying Blackmur's view, but not Eliot's.) In this difficulty it is always useful to ask : Where are the poet's ideas ? Good sense in this matter out to tell us that while the ideas doubtless exist in some form outside the poetry, as they exist for Yeats in the letters, the essays, and *A Vision*, we must nevertheless test them in the poems themselves, and not "refute" a poem in which the gyres supply certain images by showing that gyres are amateur philosophy.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer......"

—"Yeats's Romanticism ; Notes and Suggestions,"
The Southern Review, VII, 3, 1942.

(XIV)

J. C. Ransom on Yeats's Poetry

......Yeats was born into a barren or unreligious age, and lived to see it become a naturalistic or irreligious one. That was the background against which he had to exercise his gift of poetry which, like that of Shakespeare and Donne and Milton, was a gift for splendid metaphysical imagery. His importance for us now is that over the facile excitements of swarms of naturalistic poets—the tame villatic fowl we had come to—he had saved our poetic tradition in its dignity.

—"Yeats and His Symbols,"
The Kenyon Review, I, 3, 1939.

(XV)

Cleanth Brooks on Yeats's Poems

Byzantium, as Mr. R. P. Blockmur has pointed out, is the heaven of man's mind. But more especially it is a symbol of the heaven of man's imagination, and pre-eminently of a particular kind of imagination, the nature of which Yeats suggests for us in the following passage from *A Vision*.

"I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I choose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato. I think I could find in some little wineshop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions, the supernatural descending nearer to him than to Plotinus even......I think that in early Byzantium, may be never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one and that architect and artificers—though of controversy and must have grown abstract—spoken to the multitude and the few alike......(In Byzantium of this period)... ..all about......is an incredible splendour like that which we see pass under our closed eyelids as we lie between sleeping and walking, no representation of a living world but the dream of a somnambulist. Even the drilled pupil of the eye, when the drill is in the hand of some Byzantine worker in ivory, undergoes a somnambulistic change, for its deep shadow among the faint lines of the tablet, its mechanical circle, where all else is rhythmical and flowing, give to Saint or Angel a look of some great bird starting at miracle.”

(Discussing the poem ‘*A Sailing to Byzantium*’, Mr. Brooke writes :)

A quotation from *Anima Mundi* is illuminating at this point : “There are two realities, the terrestrial and the conditional, for there all opposites meet and there only is the extreme of choice possible, full freedom. And there the heterogeneous is, and evil, for evil is the strain one upon another of opposites ; but in the condition of fire is all music and all rest......” The dead whose souls have gone through all the sequences, and whose sequences have come to an end are in the condition of fire : “......the soul puts on the rhythmic or spiritual body or luminous body and contemplates all the events of its memory and every possible impulse in an eternal possession of itself in one single moment.

There is a close connection between the dead living in their passionate memories, and Yeats's theory of *Anima Mundi* or mind's eye, whether in sleep or waking, came images that one was to discover presently in some book one had never read and, after looking in vain for explanation in the current theory of forgotten personal memory, I came to believe in a great memory passing on from generation to generation. “From this great memory come to influences ; first that in flowing coming alike to men and to animals is called natural.” It is this, for example, that teaches a bird to build her nest or which shapes the child to the womb. But the second inflow “which is not natural but intellectual......is from the fire......” It is this inflow which the poet wishes to come to him and transform him shaping to a “bodily form” which is not taken :

> “From any natural thing
> But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
> Of hammered gold and gold enamelling......”

And if we inquire why the symbol of this “unnatural” form is denoted by that of a bird, though a bird of metal, we may find the reason in reading further in *Anima Mundi*......

The poem can be taken on a number of levels—as the transition from sensual art to intellectual art ; as the poet's new and brilliant insight into the nature of the Byzantine imagination ; as the poet's coming to terms with age and death. The foregoing account of the development of the symbols in the poet's personal experience will not in itself explain the fineness of the poems, or even indicate its aesthetic structure ; it will not indicate, for example, the quality of self-irony in his characterization of himself as a ‘monument of unageing intellect” or as a “tattered coat upon a stick” or the play of wit achieved is such a phrase as “the artifice of eternity”. And the account given will, for that matter, do no more than indicate the series of contrasts and paradoxes on which the poem is founded—it will not assess their function in giving the poem its power. But it may indicate in part the source of the authority which dictates the tone of the poem. The real importance of the symbolic system is that it allows the poet a tremendous richness and coherence.

"Sailing to Byzantium", as we have seen, derives its direction from the poet's own sense of loss and decay. The focus of the poem rests in the reader's sense that the poet is in Ireland, not in Byzantium. The appeal to the sages of Byzantium is made in terms of the man whose soul is "fastened to a dying animal". "Byzantium", on the other hand, a more difficult poem, concerns itself directly with the "condition of fire" and the relation of the living to the living dead......

—"Yeats : The Poet as Myth-Maker."
The Southern Review. IV, 1938.

(XVI)

R. P. Blackmur

Poetry does not flow from thin air but requires always either a literal faith, an imaginative faith, or, as in Shakespeare, a mind full of many provisional faiths. The life we all live is not alone enough of a subject for the serious artist ; it must be life with a leaning, life with a tendency to shape itself only in certain forms, to afford its most lucid revelations only in certain lights. If our final interest, either as poets or as readers, is in the reality declared when the forms have been removed and the lights taken away, yet we can never come to the reality at all without the first advantage of the form and light. Without them we should see nothing but only glimpse something unstable. We glimpse the fleeting but do not see what it is that fleets.

So it was with Yeats : his early poems are fleeting, some of them beautiful and some that sicken, as you read them, to their own extinction. But as he acquired for himself a discipline, however, unacceptable to the bulk of his readers, his poetry obtained an access to reality. So it is with most of our merits in our time—the poet who writes serious works with an intellectual aspect which are nonetheless poetry—that he performs his work in the light of an insight, a group of ideas, and a faith, with the discipline that flows from them, which taken together form a view of life most readers cannot share, and which, furthermore most readers feel as repugnant, or sterile, or simply inconsequential.

......When Yeats came of poetic age he found himself, as Blake had before him, and even Wordsworth, but to a worse extent, in a society whose conventions extended neither intellectual nor moral authority to poetry ; he found himself in a rational but deliberately incomplete, because progressive society, the emotion of thought for poetry, was gone, along with the emotion of religion and the emotion of race—the three sources and the three aims of the great poetry of the past. Tyndall and Huxley are the villains, Yeats records in his *Autobiographies*, as Blake recorded Newton, there were other causes, but no matter, these names may serve as symbols. And the dominant aesthetics of the time were as rootless in the realm of poetic import and authority as the dominant conventions. Art for Art's Sake was the cry, the Ivory Tower the retreat, and Walter Pater's luminous languor and weak Platonism the exposition. One could say anything but it would mean nothing. The poets and society both, for opposite reasons, expected the poet to produce either exotic and ornamental mysteries or lyrics of mood ; the real world and its significance were reserved mainly to the newer sciences, though the novelists' and the playwrights' mights might poach if they could. For a time Yeats succumbed, as may be seen in his early works, even while he attempted to escape ; and of his poetic generation he was the only one to survive and grow in stature. He came under the influence of the French symbolists, who gave him the clue and the hint of an external structure but nothing much to put in it. ......For he began in the late 'nineties, as it were upon his own account, to quench his thirst for reality by creating authority and significance and reference in the three fields where they were lacking. He worked into his poetry the substance of Irish mythology and Irish politics and gave them a symbolism, and he developed his experience with Theosophy and Rosicrucianism into a body of conventions adequate, for him, to animate the concrete poetry of the soul that he wished to write. He did not do these things separately, the mythology, the politics, and the magic are conceived, through the personalities that reflected them, with an increasing unity of apprehension. Thus, more than any poet of our time he has resorted to poetry the actual emotions of race and religion and what we call abstract thought. Whether we follow him in any particular or not, the general poetic energy which he liberated is ours to use if we can. If the edifice that he constructed seems personal, it is because he had largely to build it for himself, and that makes it difficult to understand in details except in reference to the peculiar unity which comes from their mere association in his life and work. Some of the mythology and much of the politics, being dramatized and turned into emotion, are part of our common possessions. But where the emphasis has been magical, whether successful or not, the poems have been misunderstood, ignored, and the actual emotion in them which is relevant to us all decried and underestimated, merely because the magical mode of thinking is foreign to our own mind and when known at all is largely associated with quackery and fraud.

......The second poem, *Sailing to Byzantium* rests upon the doctrine but is not a declaration of it. It is, rather, the doctrine in action, the doctrine actualized in a personal emotion resembling that of specific prayer. This is the emotion of the flesh where the other was the emotion of the bones. The distinction should not be too sharply drawn. It is not the bones of doctrine but the emotion of it that we should be aware of in reading the more dramatic poem ; and the nearer they come to seeming two reflections of the same thing the better both poems will be. What must be avoided is a return to the poem of doctrine with a wrong estimation of its value gained by confusion of the two poems. Both poems are serious in their own words whatever clues the one supplies to the other. I quote the third stanza......

We must not, for example, accept "perm in a gyre" in this poem merely because it is part of the doctrine upon which the poem rests. Its magical reference may be too explicit for the poem to digest. It may be merely part of the poem's intellectual machinery, something that will become a dead commonplace, once its peculiarity has worn out. Its meaning, that is, may turn out not to participate in the emotion of the poem ; which as an emotion of aspiration would have been injurious to the stanza quoted from "Byzantium" above. —"The Later Poetry of W. B. Yeats," reprinted from *The Southern Review*, II, 2, 1936.

(XVII)

Legouis and Cazamian

With Yeats, the affinities of temperament have been at work exercising a secret magnetism on the rich fund of suggestions stored in the ancient spirit of Ireland, and extracting from it all that could be harmonized with the delicacy of a subtle art. His work is more thoroughly steeped than any other in the imaginative mysticism which, we are told, is the essential attribute of Celticism. The deepest roots of this mysticism are in the old traditions of Ireland, its inspiration, no doubt, derives strong nourishment from the racy sap of the soil. But it draws as well on foreign and distant influences. India and her pantheism come in for a growing share in it ; and French symbolism has been more and more responsible for the general manner of its expression. Yeats's poetry has become increasingly intellectual. It possessed, and still has, precious gifts of nature ; it knew how to raise with words the spell of a mysterious atmosphere, how to efface the outlines of material objects in a dreamy mistiness, and to draw the most aerial and spare images upon this thin grey background, in the style of a Japanese print. A laboured and occasionally obscure reflection, with its intentions and studied effects, has since the time of his first collections of verse too often veiled those fugitive and charming glimpses. His own note, and the most striking, is still in the Ossian-like evocations, intensified by all the modern science of the inexpressible (*The Wandering of Oisin*), and in the ethereal grace of his early poems.

—*A History of English Literature.*

(XVIII)

A. G Stock on Yeats's Poetry

Yeats took the poet's creative responsibility seriously. It is useless to wonder what he might have become in a more propitious age ; he certainly intended to follow the great tradition of epic and tragedy. He set out to create images embodying whatever was permanent and exalted in the Irish imagination, to bring about a renaissance of vision that would restore 'unity of being' to Ireland and perhaps spread from Ireland through Europe. He had the creative gift had the inward conviction, but he lacked what Homer and Dante and Shakespeare undoubtedly had, what Milton could at least look back upon at the end of his life—comrades to write for, to whom the values embodied in his images as self-evident as they were to himself. To give full liberty to the epic imagination some kind of harmony is necessary between the poet and his world. And he was in a world where almost every common assumption was alien to his intuitive conviction and the solitary spirit was accorded no rights at all.

He took a long time to realize this isolation. Even after half of himself and seen through his hopes the other half was still urged into action by them, in secret brotherhood and open societies, trying to build a world where he could create freely. Long after he had given up all practical hope his need for a fellowship of the imagination was expressed in nostalgia for 'Byzantium', where all the craftsmen were unconscious of individual style absorbed in their subject-matter, and that the vision of a whole people......Yeats was not a blinded bird ; he had to know his own persuasions, opinions, ideas, religious moralities, not because he knew that great poetry had to be rooted in conviction. His convictions were as deeply held as Milton's, more coherent than Blake's who was his master, and he knew they were more than a private whim ; they belonged authentically to the European tradition, though not to its present or immediate past......

W. B. Yeats : *His Poetry on Thought*, Cambridge, 1964.

(XIX)

Pinto on Yeats's Works

The mythology which Yeats used extensively in his early poems was the great body of Gaelic heroic legend which had been presented to English readers of the late eighteenth century in the faked prose 'epic' of *Ossian* by the Scottish schoolmaster Macpherson, and which was available for a young poet a hundred years later in the more scholarly and authentic versions published by Standish O'Grady and Douglas Hyde. This mythology had never been wholly forgotten in Ireland and for the young Yeats it had the fascination that Greek mythology had for the men of the Renaissance. For him it was no more antiquarianism but something which he wholly absorbed and made part of his imaginative life as Milton absorbed the Hebrew sagas and Keats the Greek myths 'Might I not,' he wrote, 'with health and good luck to aid me, create some new *Prometheus Unbound*, Patrick or Columbkell. Ossian or Finn in Prometheus' stead, and instead, of Caucasus, Cro-Patrick of Ben Bulben ? This ambition to treat heroic themes on a large scale was very different from the spirit of the English Rhymers with their concentration on shot highly wrought poems.

(XX)

R. A. Scott-James on Yeats's Poetry

"With knowing it," he (Yeats) declared, 'I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry, and had understood this a representation of my own vision and an attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the vision outside myself, my imagination became full of decorative landscape and of still life...... The more I tried to make my art deliberately beautiful the more did I follow the opposite of myself. Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence, when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten my mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life." Now to attain style, mastery, that dignity and that lofty and severe quality Verlain spoke of, he saw that, "we should ascend out of common interest, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole." He still held that all art is dream, but it was now a representation of the walking dream of life, not merely of racial memories. Banished were the indistinct meandering emotions, the sophisticated heroism. He turned to face with growing bitterness an Ireland no longer filled with fairies.

(XXI)

Edmund Wilson on Yeats's Irish Mythology

The Irish fairies of Yeats are not, like the fairies of the ordinary fairy-story, merely smaller human beings like ourselves possessed of special supernatural power ; they are a different order of beings altogether, existing, as it were, in different dimensions. This strangeness, this real other-worldliness of the fairyland of Yeat's poetry, derives partly, no doubt, it would appear, from the fascinating anthology of Irish fairy-tales which Yeats compiled and edited from Irish folklore itself. The Sidhe were the natural creation of the dreaming and mocking Irish mind amid the illusory uncertain lights and mists of the Irish countryside. But Yeats had made of this Irish fairyland something which puts upon us a stronger spell than the spell even of the folk-tales in his anthology. Yeats's fairyland has become a symbol for the imagination itself.

But just as Yeats's early poetry presents the fascination of fairyland as something inimical to life in the world, so these stories of the life of ecstatic revelry unlike the typical writing of the *fin de siecle* aesthetes, are edged with a consciousness of dangers and temptations inescapably involved in such a life. In Yeats, we find the aestheticism of Pater carried through to its consequences. What is the consequence of living for beauty was then understood, of cultivating the imagination, the enjoyment of aesthetic sensations, as a supreme end in itself ? We shall be thrown fatally out of key with reality—we shall incur penalties which are not to be taken lightly.

There is a conflict here which cannot be evaded ; and Yeats, even in his earliest period, is unceasingly aware of this conflict.

(XXII)

David Daiches on Yeats's Poetic Tradition

In his search for a compensating tradition, Yeats went first to romantic literature, and then to mysticism of one kind and another, to folklore, theosophy, spiritualism, Neo-Platonism, and finally elaborated a symbolic system of his own, based on a variety of sources, and in terms of this he was able to give pattern and coherence to the expression of his thought. It was a search for a system rather than a search for a set of beliefs ; he sought a mode of expression rather than a set of dogmas to express. The problem for Yeats was not that of finding what he ought to say : his sensitive and restless mind provided him with a constant supply of subjects and attitudes.

When Yeats first began writing poetry, he accepted as a matter of course the thinned-out romantic tradition which demanded that poetry should be concerned with a "beautiful" world of dream, employing of language chosen for its vague emotional suggestiveness and conventional poetic associations. He had at this period no clear idea concerning his relations to his Irish background ; the influences on him were English rather than Irish, and in his treatment of Irish themes, he displayed the normal English romantic attitude toward things Celtic. But even in this earliest period his thin poetizing seems to have meant more to Yeats than the conventional practice of a craft ; the images of beauty and strangeness which he collected out of Spenser and Shelley and other less distinguished influences were intended in some vagues way which would compensate him both for his lost religion and for the confused and prosaic nature of everyday existence. He was already seeking his "infalliable church of poetic tradition." But he had as yet no thought of a system ; his church was to be built on the romantic world, compensating for the grayness of contemporary reality.

—David Daiches.

(XXIII)

F. R. Leavis on Yeats's Art and Thought

His poetry is little more than a marginal comment on the main activities of his life. No one can read his *Autobiographies* and his *Essays* without being struck by the magnificent qualities of intelligence and character he exhibits. His insight shows itself in his analysis of his own case, an analysis that suggests at the same time the complete achievement he was fated to miss. "In literature," he wrote in 1906, "partly from the lack of that spoken word which knits us to the normal man, we have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man—blood, imagination, intellect, running together—but have found a new delight in essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination, in all that comes to us most easily in elaborate music." And we find him remarking in *Aurobiographies*, "how small a fragment of our own nature can be brought to perfect expression, nor that even but with great oil, in a much divided civilization." Again, by quoting his own verse, he explicitly relates the general reflection to his own case : "Nor did I understand as yet how little that Unity (of Being), however, wisely sought, is possible without a Unity of Culture in class or people that is no longer possible at all." —F. R. Leavis.

(XXIV)

D. S. Savage on the Merits and Demerits of Yeats's Poetry

......Yeats's poetry, it seems to me, is one which, though it compels our admiration, contains an element (or, the absence of such which prevents us from finding a place for it, close to our heart. It is too remote, both too characteristic and too impersonal ; it is, again, for want of a better world, too inhuman. We can live with a speaking or a singing voice, but not with a bellow or shriek, pitched violently or ecstatically beyond the range of the human ear. This inhumaneness is not a feature of the later verse only. It runs throughout Yeats's work. I have never been able to think of Yeats's work in the abstract or to read a number of poems concretely without receiving the impression of a sort of ghostly shining phosphorescence, and this impression puzzled me for a long time until I began to see its origin and meaning. It is this peculiar quality which imparts an atmosphere of unreality to his work.

Now although as Yeats developed he left behind this dim world of dreams and began to incorporate more of concrete imagery into his verse, and although a dreamy vagueness of mood gave place to the sharpness of disenchantment and bitterness or a kind of ironical joy, nevertheless he retained his ineradicable tendency to exaggerated statement, the effect of which was necessarily to place his poetry at a remove from human life and sympathy. Even in his middle period, his love poetry is born out of a dramatic attitude rather than out of an honest relationship to experience. This is exemplified by the repeated use of hyperbolic phrases and of resounding words whose effect is to inflate the meaning. Some of Yeats's favourite words of his later period, "passionate", "rage", "turbulent", "frenzy", "murderous", "agony", "miraculous", "bitter", "blind", "wild", he overworked no less than, during his early period, he overworked words like "dim", "dreams", "pale", "desolate", "sorrow" and the rest.

—D. S. Savage.

(XXV)

Fraser on Yeats's Place in English

So, on the whole, I am ready to risk rashness, and to claim for Yeats the position of a major English poet, ranking with Donne, with Milton and with Wordsworth in the great succession. I think he is very much greater than Browning or Tennyson or Arnold, and as I have said, he has possibly more lasting qualities than poets like

Pound or Eliot, who have for us today, with our particular problems of a megalopolitan society, a more urgent topical appeal. One tests this sort of things by personal experience : "I brought Yeats's collected poems when I was in my teens. I carried them with me through my university days and through the war, I have them now ; and I find that I turn to them again for a kind of reassurance, a stimulation, a general keying-up of my responses, which I can get from no other contemporary source."

1

ADAM'S CURSE

Introduction to the Poem

Adam's Curse is one of his early poems written about the close of his first phase of poetry. It anticipates the sinewy bareness and tonal complexity of Yeats's later poetry. It begins with an anecdote. The poet expresses his views on art and love. He says that after the Fall of Adam, labour is needed for all achievements. He refers to pains that precede a work of art. Stitching and unstitching are needed before art arises. Good art must speak and must be sweet, and such art needs labour and perspiration. Then the poet describes the delicacy and refinement of love.

Paraphrase

Towards the end of one summer we were sitting together, we were three there—you, the old, beautiful woman, and I myself. We started talking of poetry. I said, "A line of poetry takes one a long time, yet it seems to be a moment's thought. Thus, stitching and unstitching art is needed before art arises. It is not like rubbing a kitchen pavement or breaking stones like a poor man in all kinds of weather. Art must be sweet and that art needs labour. Even then artists, unlike bankers, schoolmasters and clergymen, are called idlers, though they work ceaselessly. On the other hand, the martyrs are called men of action."

As I finished my talks, the beautiful old woman, whose voice was sweet and low and for whose sake all hearts would ache, replied, "A woman has to be beautiful to be admired by all. She has to work hard for beauty's gain." I said, "After Adam's fall labour is needed for all achievements. For instance, love needs utmost of politeness and refinement and they follow labour. The lovers work hard and they quote previous examples, from the old books, in their favour. Yet all their love-affair seems to be quite idle."

We got sober at the name of love. We had grown old and were about to die. In the blue-green sky the moon was washed by time's waters as they rose and fell about the stars and broke in days and years.

I wanted to tell you that you were beautiful and that I tried hard to love you in the old way of love. I also wanted to tell you that the moon is hollow and weary after the passage of time, so love also grows faint in course of time.

Notes, Word-Meanings and Explanations

[*Lines 1-14.*] "We sat together......call the world."

Gist. The poet sits with a friend and beautiful old woman. They talk on art. The poet refers to the labour that must precede a work of art.

We—the poet, his friend, and the beautiful old woman.

Summer's end—towards the end of summer.

We sat......poetry—the beginning is realistic. The woman is old yet beautiful.

Stitching—sewing ; uniting by stitching ; labour.

Unstitching—not sewing ; idleness.

Nought—nothing ; zero.

Marrow—the soft fatty substance in the hollow of bone.

Scrub—to rub ; to clean by rubbing.

Pavement—a paved path or floor.

Pauper—poor.

Better go down......weather—the poet refers to pains that precede a work of art.

Articulate—to express clearly.

Sweet sounds—sweet poetry.

Idler—inactive.

Explanation. Once towards the end of summer, the poet sat with a friend and a beautiful old woman. They started talking on poetry. The poet refers to the labour and perspiration that must precede a work of art. He says that even a line of poetry requires great labour, though, when written, it seems to be a work of no labour. He describes pains that precede a work of art. Stitching and unstitching are needed before art arises. It is not like washing a kitchen pavement or breaking stones in all kinds of weather. Art requires a different kind of labour, not the physical labour like breaking of stones. Good art must be vocal and sweet, and this art needs greater labour than the labour needed for physical work. The poet, then, refers to the irony of life of the artists. He says that bankers, schoolmasters, clergymen and martyrs are supposed to be active, and artists, though they work ceaselessly, are called idlers.

[*Lines 15-21.*] "And thereupon......to be beautiful."

Gist. The beautiful old woman in the company retorts that a woman has to be beautiful, but she has to work hard for beauty's gain.

Sweet and low—the old woman has still her voice sweet and low.

There's many......heartache—all hearts will ache for her due to the delicacy.

To be born......beautiful—a woman has to be beautiful to be admired by all. She has to work hard to be beautiful.

Explanation. When the poet has finished his talk on art, the woman expresses her own views. She is a beautiful woman. Though she is old, yet her voice is sweet and low. She is so delicate and charming that all hearts will ache for her. She retorts that a woman has to be beautiful and to be admired by all. She has to work hard for beauty's gain.

[*Lines 22-28.*] "I said......trade enough."

I—the poet who was one of the members of the company, and who started talking on art.

Fine thing—work of art.

Since Adam's fall......labouring—after the Fall of Adam labour is needed for all works of art.

So much courtesy—love requires politeness and refinement, but they can follow labour.

Precedents—previous examples.

Explanation. These lines occur in the poem entitled *Adam's Curse* by W. B. Yeats. The poet sits with a friend and a beautiful old woman. They begin to talk on art. The poet describes the labour that is needed for a work of art. The woman says that a beautiful woman has to work hard to be beautiful. Thereupon, the poet again expresses his views on the work of art. (Important).

The poet says that before the Fall of Adam, life was beautiful without labour. But after the Fall of Adam perfection is there but on the basis of hard work. Mere inspiration or chance would not do. Constant hard labour is needed for all achievements. The poet then refers to love. Love needs utmost of refinement, but that refinement must follow labour. There have been lovers who regarded refinement and politeness as the basis of love and who also quoted previous examples from authentic books to show the correctness of their view. But now love is considered to be an idle affair. The poet means to say that genuine love must follow hard labour.

[*Lines 29-34.*] "We sat grown......days and years."

Gist. Lovers sit and talk together. They talk of love. They conclude that washed by time love grows sober and cool in growing age. Hence, they sit quietly.

We—that is, the lovers.

Grow quiet—grow sober and serious.

Embers—hot remains of fire.

Shell—a hollow metal or paper-case ; the hard protective covering of certain animals and fruits ; a bomb.

Explanation. Lovers sit and talk together about love. They draw a picture of love spreading and touching each other. They then refer to the sobriety and coolness of love in old age. They illustrate their view by giving an example of the moon. They say that the moon is made hollow in the process of time. She is washed by time's waters as they rise and fall about the stars in course of time. Similarly, washed by time, love grows sober and cool in growing age. Hence, the lovers 'sit grown quiet'.

N. B.—(1) The old story of love is narrated in these lines.

(2) The poet makes a brilliant use of metaphors in these lines.

[*Lines 35-39.*] "I had a thought......hollow moon."

Gist. The lover tells her beloved that he loves her very deeply. He also tells her the old philosophy of love that the moon is hollow and weary after the passage of time, so love grows faint in course of time.

I—(stands for) the lover.

Your ears—the ears of the beloved.

Strove—tried hard ; made a hard struggle.

Weary—tired.

Hollow—excavated ; empty.

As weary-hearted......moon—the moon is hollow and weary after the passage of time, so love grows faint in course of time.

Explanation. These are the concluding lines of the poem, *Adam's Curse* by W. B. Yeats. In the preceding lines, the poet has referred to the talks of the lovers who sit together and talk about love. They describe the sobriety and coolness of love in the growing age. In these lines, the lover describes the philosophy of love.

The lover tells his beloved that she was very beautiful and attractive and so he tried his best to love her in the old way of love. He, then, describes the philosophy of love. He gives an example of the moon to illustrate his view. He says that the moon is hollow and weary after the passage of time. So love grows faint in course of time. The idea is that in love there is ardour, and it grows, but after some time it fades. What a frustration in love ! This is the whole philosophy of love, *i. e.*, one who loves must get frustrated, and love gets fainted with the passage of time. (Important).

A Critical Appreciation of the poem 'Adam's Curse'

Poems like *The Folly of Being Comforted* and *Adam's Curse* are two of those poems that state the poet's bare conviction with a bare sheer penetrating power which could only be weakened by ornaments. The fire of passion has purged them of all that is superfluous. The whole rings true. There is no symbolism or metrical decoration about such poems. Eliot comments that in these poems 'something is coming through' and that Yeats 'in beginning to speak as a particular man......is beginning to speak for man.'

Adam's Curse includes a revealing aside on how Yeats wrote his poetry.

> "I said, 'A line will take us hours may be ;
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been nought......' "

Before the Fall, things were beautiful ; life was free from the need of labour. Since then, anyone seeking perfection in expression had to work hard and not take inspiration for granted. There was need for hard work. This truth about art is expressed in this poem. The poem, like *The Folly*, begins as an anecdote. The poet was one day sitting with a friend and a beautiful old woman and talked of poetry. The poet was expatiating on the need of fundamental brain-work in the art of writing poetry. The old woman brought in her experience—"We must labour to be beautiful." The poet added that not only in literature but also in love, it is necessary to work hard and not rely on rule of thumb methods. The last two stanzas revert to Yeats's old sentimental manner and sketch a picture of the lover and the lass sitting and talking of love. On the face of it, the poem appears to be a mere disquisition on style, and as such, is hardly fit for poetic presentation. But passion redeems it. The poet has aimed at, and succeeded in reproducing educated conversation in a heightened form. He has not kept to words which were and are normally regarded as poetic. He uses such colloquialisms as 'marrow-bones' or 'kitchen-pavements', without destroying the charm of his verse. In the crucible of his imagination discordant material gets fused and united into a thing of art. Well may the poet feel and he was gaining in strength ; and in 1903, he had written to Lady Gregory : "You need not be troubled about my poetic faculty. I was never so full of new thoughts for verse. My work has got far more masculine. It has more salt in it." It was the salt, not of attitudinizing, but of real conviction.

The poet expresses the views on art. He says that before the Fall of Adam, art was beautiful. It was without labour. After the Fall, perfection is there but on the basis of hard work. Mere inspiration or chance would not do. Hard, constant work and effort is needed for every great work of art. Mere inspiration would not do ; perspiration is also essential. He expresses himself in the following vein :

> "A line will take us hours may be,
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been nought,
> Better go down upon your marrow-bones
> And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
> Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather
> For to articulate sweet sounds together
> Is to work harder than all these."

Besides, the poet refers to the Fall and points out the need of labour :

> "It's certain there is no fine thing
> Since Adam's Fall but needs much labouring."

The poem embodies the deep philosophy of love. The last two stanzas are a feast for lovers who sit together and talk. The conversation of the lovers is about love. They draw a picture of love spreading and touching each other. They point out that washed by time love grows sober and is cool in old age. Hence, lovers in old age grow quiet. Besides, in love there is ardour and depth. It grows but after some time it fades. This is the frustration in love. The poet refers to this in these lines :

> "We sat grown quiet at the name of love ;

We saw the last embers of daylight die,

× × ×

I had a thought for no one's but your ears ;
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love ;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon."

The language of the poem is easy and simple. The style is direct and clear. The poem is characterized by straightforwardness of narration. It begins like an anecdote and possesses all the essentials of an anecdote. The narration is quite forceful. Mark the beginning :

"We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful old woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry."

According to Dr. B. Rajan, "*Adam's Curse* is a breakaway in the direction of common speech but remains self-conscious in the manner of its breakaway......Note the element of self-pity in 'martyrs', the highly simplified conception of the 'world' and the limited view of poetry as the articulation of 'sweet sounds'. The language moves in what we must accept as the right direction but in its studied avoidance of artificiality it is not immune from an artificiality of its own. The decorum is still provisional and unsettled and, towards the end of the poem, lapses back into something like the old manner."

●

2

AEDH WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN

Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven is a small poem. It belongs to the dream period of Yeats's poetic career. It presents the poet as a common lover who is ready to spread, not to say of earth, even the whole of heaven if it could be converted into a piece of cloth before his beloved. Aedh is the mouthpiece of Yeats and can be identified as the poet Yeats himself, "Your feet" refers to the feet of Maud Gonne, Yeats's beloved. The poem reads as follows :

> "Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
> Enwrought with golden and silver light,
> The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
> Of night and light and the half-light,
> I would spread the cloths under your feet.
> But I, being poor, have only my dreams ;
> I have spread my dreams under your feet ;
> Tread softly because you tread on my dreams."

"If I could have heavens' embroidered cloths wrought with golden and silver light, if the night, the day and the half-day could be turned into the form of different coloured cloths, I would spread them all under my beloved's feet But, alas ! It cannot be a reality. I am poor, and can only dream. I cannot have heaven converted into the form of cloths. But I have dreams like this, and have spread them under your feet, my dear beloved. So tread on them very softly because you go on treading on my dreams, that is you are always in my dreams."

The poem is remarkable for its intensity and emotional appeal. The poet has used his usual practice of conveying personal ideas and feelings through the Irish legendary figures. Now the mouthpiece is Aedh whereas in *The Song of the Wandering Aengus*, it was Aengus who was the lover-poet's mouthpiece. Aedh also appears in another poem of Yeats—*Aedh Tells of the Rose in His Heart*—in the following manner :

> "All things uncomely broken, all things worn out and old,
> The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering
> cart,
> The heavy steps of the plowman, splashing the wintry mold,
> Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps
> of my heart.

> The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;
> I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
> With the earth and the sky and the water, remade like a carpet of gold.
> For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart."

The poem is in the form of quartets. It is a union of two quartets rhyming—a b a b c d c d. It is also remarkable for the simplicity of its diction and all those qualities for which Romanticism stands After reading a poem like this, one could easily say that Yeats was a last romantic.

●

3

AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

Introduction to the Poem

Among School Children was written in 1926, and the poem appeared in the volume, *The Tower*. The poem is in eight stanzas, and each stanza consists of eight lines. When the poet composed the poem, he was a member of the Irish Senate and a successful public figure. The poem was activized by the poet's visit to Waterford Convent School. As he entered the school, he was received by an old nun who conducted him through different classes. The children, in the classes, look with wonder at the sixty-year old smiling public man. But memories soon crowd in upon him and he is reminded of Maud Gonne as she must have been as a child at school. "A stiffled nostalgic sigh works as the prevailing undertone and gives a tragic solemnity to the whole picture."

Word-meanings, Annotations, Paraphrase, etc.

Stanza 1

To Cypher—reference is to the sums in arithmetic.

To cut and sew—to cut a piece of cloth and sew it into a garment.

Be neat in everything—do everything efficiently and well.

In the best modern way—in an excellent, up-to-date manner.

A sixty-year old smiling public man—the visiting poet himself who was then sixty years old and a member of the Irish Senate, and public figure of success and repute.

Paraphrase

The poet visited the Waterford Convent School in 1926. He was received and conducted by a nun. She showed to him all the class-rooms, answered all his questions. The children were learning arithmetic, singing, history, tailoring, etc. Some of them were reading their-text-books. They were learning quite efficiently, and were being taught through modern ways. The children stared at the poet with wonder, for he was an old man of sixty and was a smiling public figure.

Stanza 2

Ledaen body—'Ledaen' is adjective from 'Leda' who was the mother of Helen, the famous beauty of Greek mythology. The phrase, therefore, means classical beauty like that of Helen.

Sinking fire—dying embers in the grate ; the fire nearing extinction.

Harsh reproof—sharp rebuke.

Tragedy—sorrow ; unhappiness.

Blent into a sphere—became united.

Of the one shell—of one and the same egg.

Paraphrase

As the poet casts his glance at the little girl-students in the school, he is reminded of another Ledaen beauty, Maud Gonne, with well-chiselled Leda-like classic features. He recalls that Maud, too, must have been a student once at school like the little girls that stand before him at that time. The past is thus linked up with the present. The image of Maud reminded him of a particular day when she had told him how, while at school petty incidents or reproofs from the teacher would cause great unhappiness to her, and would turn the entire day into a tragedy. The poet had listened to her narration, had sympathized with her, till their two souls had seemed to fuse and blend into one, like the yolk and white of an egg. In other words, when she had told him of the incident, he had sympathized with her till the two had become as united as the yellow and the white parts of the egg are.

N.B.— 'Ledaen body' bent over a sinking fire recalls a moment of childish communion when two natures are blended into a sphere, or into the yolk and white of the same shell. The alteration of Plato's parable in the *Symposium* serves to remind us that the sphere and the egg, which can turn perpetually inside out without breaking, are Yeatsian symbols of ultimate reality. It also reminds us that Yeats regards the restoration of innocence as the highest achievement of the intellect.

Stanza 3

Daughters of the Swan—beautiful women like Helen who was born as a result of the sexual copulation of god Zeus (in the guise of a swan) and Leda, a beautiful human girl.

Paddler's heritage—characteristic of women of ordinary common type. The word 'paddler' has derogatory implications.

Paraphrase

Having thought upon the sad event which his beloved once narrated to him, the poet's thoughts keep running on the image of Maud Gonne, and he looks upon this girl and that, and imagines that Maud Gonne as a child must have been very much like that of Helen—the daughter of the Swan—but even beautiful women (the daughters of the swan) have something common with plain women having ordinary features. The colour of the cheeks and hair of one of the girls reminds him of the complexion of his beloved, his imagination runs wild, and sees her as if she were actually standing before him.

Stanza 4

Quattrocento—in Italian a term for the 15th century, its literature and art, the early Renaissance.

Ledaen kind—like Leda, the beautiful mother of the famous beauty Helen.

Had pretty plumage once—was once young and beautiful.

To smile on all that smile—to maintain a cheerful look.

Comfortable kind of old scarecrow—a presentable figure still, though grown old.

Pharaphrase

The poet's thought and imagination continues to fix on Maud Gonne's image. He is reminded of Maud's looks in her old age. She was like a piece of Renaissance art although she had hollow cheeks, was old and decrepit, and looked as if she drank only wind and had only shadows to eat. Still, despite her old age, she was a fit object for a great work of art. She looked presentable even in old age. By a natural transition, the poet then begins to think of his own old age. Though he was never of the Ledaen kind, yet he too was quite handsome once, and had pretty plumage as well. But now he has become a sort of scarecrow. Once must make the best of a bad bargain and keep a smiling face, whatever he may feel within. It is no use sighing over vanished youth and beauty. One must keep smiling and show the world that even if one has grown a scarecrow, one is at least a comfortable kind of scarecrow. Old age and death are grim realities. They must be accepted, and one must learn to make the best of a bad bargain.

Stanza 5

Honey of generation—the happy incident of birth.

The drug decide—the honey of generation is the drug to kill the recollections of prenatal freedom.

Compensation for the pang of his birth—a reward for the travails suffered by her in the process of giving birth to him.

Paraphrase

Decay and decline is the law of nature, and no human effort can alter this law. If mothers knew how ugly and decrepit their sons would look in their old age, none of them would like to take the trouble of bearing children or starting them in their lives. Sons will then no longer be a source of joy or a sort of compensation to their mothers for the pain of bringing them into this world. The 'honey of generation' is the drug that destroys in the newly-born soul the recollections of its prenatal freedom. The newly-born child accepts this life and forgets its earlier freedom. Similarly, mothers too must forget how their children will look in their old age, if the process of life is to continue

N B.—(1) "In the fifth stanza, the poet correlates his thoughts with the fancies of proud mothers regarding their children. If these mothers knew how shrivelled and ugly their young ones would look at the age of sixty or thereabouts, none of them will perhaps agree to bear children and undertake the trouble of starting them on their careers."

(2) "Recalling (as Saul notes) the second song from the opening of *At the Hawk's Well,* Yeats asks which mother would accept the decrepit shape of her son in old age as compensation for the pain of bringing him into this world. The 'honey' of generation is the drug that destroys in the newly-born soul the recollection of prenatal freedom (Yeats, taking the phrase from Porphyry, uses it, as he admits, for his own ends) ; but mothers, too, need their share of oblivion if the process of life is to continue."—Dr. B. Rajan. (Very Important)

Stanza 6

Spume—unsubstantial like froth thrown up by liquid.

Ghostly—shadowy ; unreal.

Paradigm—an example ; a model.

Of things—of reality.

Played the taws—whipped.

Soldier Aristotle—man of action and of substance and reality (weightier than Plato).

Images—illusions.

Presences—idols.

Paraphrase

Educationists and philosophers have had different experiences and ideas of man and his culture ; they have imposed themselves upon others, but have been unable to fight against old age. Plato explained away the world as the shadow of ideas with God ; life to him was bit of unreality, a mere shadow or reflection of the world of ideas (Plato's 'theory of ideas'). The next great philosopher was Aristotle. He thrashed Alexander into some sort of culture, for he was Alexander's tutor ('play the taws' means to whip). Aristotle's philosophy is more realistic, practical and weighty, but Alexander learnt little from him. Another great philosopher, Pythagoras, gave out that he was "golden thighed." He was himself a great musician and could listen to the 'music of the spheres' or the musical sound produced by the planets as they moved in their orbits. But all the profound wisdom of these great philosophers was of no avail to them. It could not check the natural process of ageing. Despite philosophies, they beeame old and broken, like a scarecrow, with the passing of the time. None can fight against time ; hence, it is futile and useless to mourn over the loss of youth and beauty.

N. B.—(1) G. S. Fraser remarks, "Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras could impress the world, but they do not impress Yeats ; for he sees them evading a problem—the problem of the growing hollowness of greatness and wisdom, the growing unconvincingness of "all these dreams by which man long', he himself, in this poem, is facing squarely and honestly. Plato tried to pretend that his decaying natural body is something illusory, that reality is spiritual, but Yeats's use of 'ghostly' (with its connotation of spectral, phantasmal, unreal) makes Plato's heaven of bodiless abstractions enlivened. In it Yeats makes them much more obvious when he talks of 'soldier' Aristotle than Plato in the sense of shrewder, more down-to-earth, more acute by world's standards, and also in the sense of, by other standards, grosser, more earthy, more obtuse. The 'realistic' nature of Aristotle's consolations—the tangible birch on the tangible royal bottom—are mocked at brilliantly. The lines are, what they are meant to be, broadly and cruelly funny. Nor is Pythagoras, though he is perhaps, a philosopher more to Yeats's taste, exempt from mockery—he is 'world famous'……and obviously he loves his fame; he allows lies to be spread about him, such as that he has a golden thigh. With a genuine interest in mathematics and music, he nevertheless, in a brilliant charlatan's fashion, puts his philosophy together out of any bits and pieces that are handy :

"What a star sang and careless muses heard !'

Perhaps the tone about Pythagoras is a little less harsh than about the other two. But the continuing note of scorn is unmistakable, and the last line clinches it :

"Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird."

(2) "The sudden descent, from the romantic phrasing of the fifth, sixth, and seventh lines, to the racy, earthy idiom of 'old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird' is the dramatic use of language, which delivers judgment by changing the perspective."—(A. G. Stock).

(3) "The fluent singing movement of sixth stanza signalizes the shift into philosophy, but the consolations of wisdom are ironic. Plato suggests to us that we live among phantoms. Aristotle's more substantial knowledge is gently mocked, and one is reminded that Alexander learned little from his mentor. Golden-thighed Pythagoras (Tyndall quotes Plutarch for the detail and Wain, Diogenes, Laertius) represents the philosophy of art in contrast to that of nature, or ideas ; but even the music of the spheres is, in the last analysis, the song of a scarecrow."—(B. Rajan).

Stanza 7 & 8

Bruised—made to suffer.

To pleasure soul—to satisfy the soul.

Blear-eyed—with swollen eyes.

Bole—the trunk of a tree.

Paraphrase of Stanza 7

The poet continues to reflect on the manifold illusions fostered by the human spirit. Passionate lovers, affectionate mothers, and pious nuns, all worship illusions, mere phantoms. Their adoration of cherished images blinds them to the harshness of reality. The beloveds are never so good and beautiful as they are imagined, sons never so dutiful and handsome, and the gods never so just and merciful. Still this image-worship, this worship of illusions goes on. As a matter of fact, these images symbolize glorious ideals which man set before him, but which he is never able to attain. These ideals mock at all human efforts to attain them. They are mockeries of the heart, just as great philosophies are mockeries of the mind. None of them can alter the facts of life or influence the course of nature. Despite them, youth and beauty must perish. So the poet emphasizes that only images escape the disintegration of age. Nuns worship images ; mothers do the same ; so does the lover (that is why the nuns continue in their devotion to their godhead, mothers continue to cherish their children and, lovers continue to love their beloveds—as Yeats, the scarecrow, loves Maud Gonne, the hollow-cheeked old woman). But the pity of it all is that even these images seem to mock man's enterprise, they break hearts, because in real life gods are seldom as good, children seldom so worthwhile, the beloved seldom really worth loving as imagined by the nuns, mothers and lovers respectively.

N. B.—"The three selves of child, lover and the scarecrow and the three philosophers, give way to another triad—the 'presences' worshipped by the passion of lovers, the piety of nuns and the affection of mothers. There are mockeries of the heart but the poem has already suggested that there are also mockeries of the mind. Nevertheless, it is who creates the ideals which he is ironically unable to attain ; heavenly glory only exists as the intellect and the imagination shapes it. This is the familiar and central Yeatsian movement—out of absurdity into an affirmation of man's creative power, validated by the irony through which it has been made to live. The verse also conveys this recognition, not only in what it says but in how it moves ; an intensity of irony, which can be almost derisive, is swept without hesitation into the poetry, surviving not as a tension to be exploited, but as a part of the fluent, securely singing, unity."—(B. Rajan).

Paraphrase of Stanza 8

In the last stanza, the poet says that life is made up of opposites like the chestnut-tree which is neither leaf, nor blossom, nor trunk, but a sum total of all the three. Thus, he does not show any great regard for the previous images. He would like to tell them how not to break human heart. The ideal conditions are when the body is not bruised for the soul ; and when wisdom is not sougnt through burning the midnight oil. The soul and the body are not at variance ; to separate them and prefer one against the other is to declare one's ignorance. Harmony between them is the ideal. To make this point, the poet gives two examples, one from nature, and the other from art. The chestnut tree which has strong roots and fine flowers is neither the leaf, nor the blossom, nor, again the bole (the body/trunk or stem of the tree). It is a combination of all the three and many other things besides. In art, when a person is dancing, it is impossible to separate the dancer and the dance. For if the dance is over, the dancer is no more the dancer. Thus the poem ends on a note of mystical acceptance of the world as it is. The crisis had taken place within him ; a timely utterance has given him the needed relief. And he got this relief by the use of rich symbols. The more one thinks of them, the richer they appear to be. The dancer and the dance might just as well stand for the comic dance and individual's life.

N. B.—(1) Just as a chestnut-tree is neither leaf, nor blossom or bole, but the sum total of all three, so also man is neither mind, nor body, nor soul, but an united entity of the three. Life becomes really fruitful and labour is truly rewarding when the body is not harmed or sacrificed for the sake of the soul, and when the diligence of the scholar does not make him "clear-eyed." Just as a dancer cannot be isolated from the dance, so also the body cannot be separated from the soul. Harmony between the two is indispensable for self-fulfilment, for the bloom and beauty of the tree of life.

(2) "The last stanza raises an important difficulty of construction. It is possible to read the first sentence as 'Labour becomes blossoming or dancing, whenever the body is not bruised to pleasure soul etc'..... or, as 'blossoming or dancing in which the body is not bruised to pleasure soul etc. is labour.' The first reading is the one that is generally (though implicitly) accepted ; but the second is grammatically possible and, radical though it may seem, perhaps has the weight of the poem behind it. The imaginative logic is surely more consistent if we argue that beauty and despair, the pleasure of the soul and the bruising of the body, the diligence of the scholar and his 'blear-eyed' wisdom are inseparably part of the life process, just as the chestnut-tree is neither leaf, nor bole, but the creative unity of all three."—(B. Rajan).

A Critical Appreciation of the poem 'Among School Children'

Among School Children is a remarkable poem of Yeats. It appeared in the volume entitled *The Tower*. Composed in the year 1926, it was occasioned by Yeats's visit to Waterford Convent School on an inspection as a memper of the Irish Senate at the age of sixty. As the poet entered, he was conducted through the classes by a kind old nun. The children were at their work. They looked at him with open-eyed wonder. Some of the girls had complexion like that of Maud Gonne. This reminded him of Maud Gonne's childhood and her school days. But soon he began to philosophize about old age.

As Dr. B. Rajan points out, the poem is not, as Yeats called it, a curse upon old age ; but it is also not a justification of old age or even of life. What it offers is not a solution but a response, and the contrasts it presents between youth and age, the ideal and the actual, man's nobility and man's absurdity, are presented as roots of the blossoming conviction that without contraries there can be no life. Tree and dancer do not represent life as opposed to philosophy, or a unity of being that is beyond both life and philosophy ; they represent, neither, the recognition that every condition demands its opposite, that truth as it is given to us grows out of the tension between opposites and that truth cannot be known but only lived.

The poet, on a semi-official visit to the Convent School, dreams of his beloved's childhood, though he does not name her :

"I dream of a Ledaen body, bent
Above a sinking fire a tale that she
Told of harsh report, or trivial event
That changed some childish day to tragedy—
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
Into the yolk and white of the one shell."

He finds something common among the daughters of the swan ; even some of the features, or say complexion of the most beautiful women are common to all :

"For even daughters of the swan can share
Something of every paddler's heritage—
And had that color upon cheek or hair,
And thereupon my heart is driven wild ;
She stands before me as a living child."

Then comes the thought of Maud Gonne's present looks—hollow of cheeks ; the poet thinks of his own body also ; once upon a time, he also was handsome, but now he has become a kind of scarecrow. One must make the best of a bad bargain and keep a smiling face, whatever he may feel within. In the fifth stanza, the poet correlates his thoughts with the fancies of proud mothers regarding their children. If these mothers knew how shrivelled and ugly their young ones would look at the age of sixty or thereabouts, none of them will perhaps agree to bear children and undertake the troubles of starting them on their careers.

Then the poet mocks at the great philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras, who, despite their best efforts, could not find out any solution for age. Their bodies also decayed like those of the poet and his beloved :

"Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things ;
Soldier Aristotle played the taws
Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
What a star sang and careless Muses heard ;
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird."

Yet all worship images. Nuns worship images ; mothers do the same ; so do the lovers. But the pity is that even these images seem to mock man's enterprise, they break hearts, because in real life gods are seldom as good, children seldom so worthwhile, the beloved seldom really worth loving, as imagined by the nuns, mothers and lovers respectively for the nuns love gods, the mothers their children, the lovers their beloveds.

At last the poet finds refuge in the general philososphical balance of soul, mind and body. As a tree is a tree because of the union of the root, the stem and the leaf, so is the human body a union of soul, mind and body. It is in harmony and balance that human life is perfect. Hence, soul and body are not at variance, as the dancer is not at variance with his dance. Thus, the poem ends on a note of mystical acceptance of the world as it is :

> "Labour is blossoming or dancing where,
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
> Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
> O chestnut-tree, great rooted blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole ?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer ftom the dance ?"

Analysing the theme of the poem, Unterecker has observed : "Yeats's own selves—the baby, child, and old scarecrow,—metamorphosis common to all men ; three kinds of images, worshipped by lovers, nuns and mothers ; the 'presences' known to passion (lovers), piety (nuns), and affection (mothers) ; the three systematizers of the sixth stanza who offer different ways locating in it nature, and Pythagoras discovering it in art ; and a whole host of minor trinities. These trios, suggesting relationship and interrelatioship, lead Yeats to the final discovery that blossoming and dancing can be seen in terms of the total organism."

The sudden descent, from the romantic phrasing of the fifth, sixth and seventh lines in the sixth stanza, to the racy, earthy idiom of 'old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird' is dramatic use of language which delivers judgment by changing the perspective. Great philosophers do not impress Yeats. They all labour under disillusions and try to escape reality in his opinion.

The poem is remarkable for its very rich and complex imagery. 'Ledaen body', the alteration of 'Plato's parable into the yolk and white of the one shell', 'daughters of the swan' are images from ancient mythology. Image of 'scarecrow' is a famous and oft-repeated image of Yeats. The 'peddlar's heritage,' 'honey of generation' are images from everyday life whereas 'Chestnut-tree', 'the blossom or the bole' are from Nature. Yeats also makes use of philosophical resources in Plato with a ghostly paradigm of things, the soldier Aristotle and the golden-thighed Pythagoras.

Peter Ure regards this poem as an image of the "conviction". The poem according to him is in part wound upon the same spool of thought as *Adam's Curse* and *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, although it is immensely stronger and richer. The first two stanzas make their connexions carefully and logically in terms of the immediate experience. Whereas the first two stanzas are concerned with the immediate experience—the sixty-year old smiling public man among the school children, and the sudden heart-catching glimpse of an imagined resemblance reminding him of his beloved's present image—in the next two stanzas, the hiding-places of thought open, and two violent movements blow us right away from the school-room, the poet, and his visual images of his lady, into the kingdoms of anguish, uncertainty and scorn from whence arise the convictions that "sustain us in defeat or give us victory".

Whereas the subjects of the first two stanzas relate to childhood and education, the stanzas to old age, its anguish and inevitability. At last the poet comes to his final statement about what human life itself should ideally be like—a man not toiling with his lifelike children in a school, but a radiant unity of being, like dancer and blossoming chestnut-tree ; never, therefore, "weary-hearted" like the characters in *Adam's Curse*, on part of him bruised by labours for the sake of some other part, but instead answering to that old dream of Owen in *The Tables of the Law* :

> "I know nothing certain as yet but this—I am to become completely alive..... I shall create a world where the whole lives of men shall be articulated and simplified as if seventy years were but one moment, or as if they were the leaping of a fish or the opening of a flower."

Peter Ure adds : "*Among School Children* is amongst the most difficult of all Yeats's poems, and in conjoining the vision of heavenly perfection with a vision of the ideal human life, goes a stage further than even the most famous of all, the two Byzantium poems. In these, death alone permits an ideal life. Like *Leda and the Swan*, the Byzantium poems gain much of their effect from being manifestly based on a rich substratum of ideological and pictorial experience, and have, therefore, exacted a multiplicity of commentary. To read them in the light of *Among School Children* is to understand them more easily.

4

A BRONZE HEAD

Introduction to the Poem

A Bronze Head is one of Yeats's last poems which was included in the title *Last Poems*. It was inspired by a statue of Maud Gonne in her old age by Lawrence Campbell placed in the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art at Dublin In the summer of 1938, Maud Gonne came to visit Yeats at Riversdale, and to her immense surprise and pleasure, he said, as she was leaving, "Maud, we should have gone on with our Castle of the Heroes." He wanted Sir William Rothenstein to portray her statuesque old age :

> "I wish you find some way of making a drawing of Maud Gonne. No artist has ever drawn her and just now but an air-raid that could bring her to London. She might come to see the spectacle."
>
> —(Sir William Rothenstein, *Scattering Branches*', p. 81)

At head of Maud Gonne, Yeats's phoenix by Lawrence Campbell in the Dublin Municipal Gallery inspired this fine poem which appeared in his *Last Poems and Plays* which left the subject of her human and superhuman qualities, and yet again faced death triumphantly. But the critics are not perfectly sure whether Iseult Gonne could have been in Yeats's mind. But this much is certain that Maud Gonne serves as a model for this poem.

Word-meanings, Annotations, Paraphrase, etc.

Stanza 1

Bronze head—a bronze statue—bronze is a compound metal, brown in colour. It is compounded of brass and copper.

Tomb-haunter—a bird of prey that haunts graveyards.

Hysterica Passio—the fury of passion ungoverned by the intellect.

Paraphrase

The bronze statue of Maud Gonne (representing her old age) is placed at the right side of the entrance to the Art Gallery, Dublin. By one, first glance of the face of the statue, one cannot at once decide whether the statue is that of a human or a superhuman being. The face is human, but the terrified glance in her eyes makes the poet feel that she was guided and controlled by some supernatural power. Thus, she is both human and superhuman. In old age, her face (as well as other limbs of her body) is withered like a mummy, but her eyes, indomitably alive, have an eagle-terrified look, like that of a lone bird of prey in a graveyard, who sweeps the sky in the hope of finding some signs of life there, and whose inner terror is intensified by the complete emptiness of the sky. Everything may wither, but her fury and passion will not wither.

N. B.—(1) The poet sets the first stanza in the Dublin Municipal Gallery where Lawrence Campbell's bronze-painted plaster bust of Maud Gonne was on display. The poet examines her old age aspect which except for a 'bird's round eye', is 'withered and mummy-dead'. But there is something in human personality that is immortal. The immortal—the supernatural element 'sweeps the distant sky'. The life in the round eye of Maud Gonne gives her the supernatural quality that he had observed in Byzantine ivories in which "Even the drilled pupil of the eye..... undergoes a somnambulistic change, for its deep shadow among the faint lines of the tablet, its mechanical circle, where all else is rhythmical and flowing, give to Saint or Angel a look of some great bird staring at miracle"—(*A Vision*) Like the eye to the tomb-haunter, that eye is terrorized of its own emptiness.

(2) In this stanza, the poet also studies the effect of the old age on Maud Gonne, and her extraordinary powers in her eyes. The lady once was gifted with the supernatural qualities, now she has undergone a metamorphosis owing to the destruction caused by the changing time. In this world, things are not immune from destruction. Maud is both mortal and immortal, human and superhuman.

Stanza 2

Magnanimity—nobility of soul, generosity and unselfishness.

Substance—spirit.

McTaggart—a philosopher.

Paraphrase

In this stanza, the poet sets the magnanimity of light against the darkness of Maud Gonne's old age Yeats thinks about the complex nature of flesh. He remembers the time when Maud Gonne was young and beautiful, when she was not at all like the dark tomb-haunter memorialized in the form of the bronze statue. At that time the poet had thought that her bright, beautiful form expressed the nobility of her soul, and her unselfish and generous nature. She seemed to be a most gentle woman. She had in this way two forms—one in her youth, and the other in the old age. The poet is not very much clear as to which of the two forms expressed her soul rightly and truly. Or, perhaps no single form can fully express the spirit. He agrees with the wise McTaggart that soul is composite, made of a number of elements, and it cannot be reduced to a single principal. Even the extremes of life and death may be held in balance within the narrow confines of a tragic personality. At least this seems to be the case with Maud Gonne, and hence, the statue truly represents her spirit, for, in the statue, her eyes are "indomitably alive", but all else is "mummy-dead".

N.B.—Compare Yeats's yoking together contraries with Blake's principle of contraries.

Stanza 3

Sleek—smooth, soft and glossy.

Propinquity—close kinship ; similarity.

Paraphrase

In this stanza the poet says that the head is both human and superhuman. Even when the poet had first known Maud Gonne 'all sleek and new', he had seen the natural, the wildness in her. She seemed to him to have offered a 'soul-shattering vision of terror', which in turn, made Yeats wild. And he cried : "My child, my child."

The poet remembers that the terror which haunts the close of her life, was also nascent in the wild glance of her eyes even in her youth, when she was in the full bloom of her beauty, sleek and fresh, soft and glossy, like a mare about to start on a long journey. This terror in her eyes had filled the poet with foreboding, not for himself but for her. The poet felt that some terrible vision had shattered her soul. Increased contact with her brought a truer understanding, and his imagination rejected all that was untrue He realized the truth that the wildness in the artist shapes the wildness of subject. Hence, the wildness of Maud Gonne was not something inherent in her, but was imparted to her by his own wild imagination. In any case, it is hard to distinguish between the existing truth and the artist's truth.

Stanza 4

Gangling stocks—stocks or families which go in gangs or groups, not having the courage to stand alone, as contrasted with the great stock or families which have their own individuality and family traditions. Gangling expresses the poet's contempt for the masses.

Ancestral pearls .....sty—age-old traditions and values which are being ignored and defiled. It is as if they are being thrown into a pig sty, foul and filthy.

Sty—mean or dirty novel.

Heroic reverie—the thoughts of the great ; the aristocratic values of life.

Paraphrase

The poet ultimately prefers to regard her as something superhuman and divine, for she does not seem to be a free agent, but controlled and guided by some supernatural force working within her 'as though a sterner eye looked through her eye'. It was this supernatural power that looked through her eyes and that accounted for the 'wildness' or 'terror' of her glance. It was for this reason that she looked so sternly on the "foul world" in the last stages of decay. According to the poet's belief, the present cycle of history was ending and the decay and final ruin of the present Christian civilization was near. Hence, it was that the world had grown so rotten and foul. Great families were dying out, while the contemptible, unworthy crowds were rising to greatness. Old values and traditions, precious as pearls, were being ignored and defiled, fools and rascals made fun of the great and the heroism. The beautiful world was ripe for destruction, and perhaps this degeneracy accounted for the wildness and terror of Maud Gonne.

N. B.—(1) Thus, the poet looked into all this foul world as if it will burn it to ashes. Even heroic reverie in this foul world is mocked by clowns and knaves. One can wonder what is left there of its civilization that can be saved. This is a foul world where great stocks have run dry, the pearls have been thrown into dirty places and the heroism is made fun of by the fools and the knaves. On this foul world in its fall and decline Maud Gonne was like Leda and Helen of Troy, mortal and immortal, girl and prophetess.

(2) In the last stanza, says Dr. B. Rajan, "the verse strides authoritatively through its anger, and the monstrous alliteration of 'gangling stocks grown great shows how fully alive the movement is to the passionate contempt which it conveys. The end comes in the ferocious paradox of the final alexandrine with that climactic force of which few besides Yeats are capable."

A Critical Appreciation of the poem 'A Bronze Head'

A Bronze Head is one of the important poems from *Last Poems* (1936). The poem was inspired by a head of his phoenix, Maud Gonne, which was prepared by Lawrence Campbell in the Dublin Municipal Gallery. The poet's interest in statuary is the result of his visit to Sicily and Rome. The poet illustrates the "theory that the depth of the eye-socket had some connection with the state of given civilization." This idea is illustrated in this poem :

> "Here at right of the enterance this bronze head,
> Human, superhuman, a bird's round eye,
> Everything else withered and mummy-dead."

In *Beautiful Lofty Things* also Maud Gonne is seen in terms of statuary.

> "......Maud Gonne Howth station waiting a train
> Pallas Athena in that straight back and arrogant head."

The values of statuary, says T. R. Henn, were linked in a curious manner to the Noh Plays :

> "......Statues full of an august formality that implies
> traditional measurements, a philosophic defence."

"The measurements refer not only to the 'divine perfection' achieved by the Greeks, but also to the rules of proportion which the Egyptians followed for their human figures"—(Henn) The characters of Yeats have become artefacts. Their history is transformed into terrible and gay form. In this poem Maud Gonne herself becomes such an image.

"This lovely, generous portrait combines two of Yeats's most persistent themes, those of 'contemporary degeneration' and the ravages of time." The poet has constructed his poem around an imagery of natural and supernatural vision. He cloaks his abstractions in the passions of the artist. He embodies 'sleek', 'withered', 'mummy-dead' in great art.

Thus, the admirable poem *A Bronze Head* is both a portrait and a reinterpretation of Maud Gonne's character in the light of his fuller and better understanding of her nature and temperament. The poet had fallen passionately in love with her at first sight, and his passion proved to be a lifelong devotion. She was for him "the loveliest woman born", and with all her classical beauty and measured features she seemed to him to be the very embodiment of the old-age traditions of the aristocratic way of life, which the poet idealized. Maud was the Leda or Helen of Yeats's age. But her actions linked her in thoughts with the mindless destructive fury of the mob—(the *hysterica passio* of the mob). This antimony in her personality resulted in the deepest cleavage in his life. He had tried to excuse her by linking her up with Helen and Deirdre. Like them she had a 'destructive beauty' and could not help doing what she did:

> "Why, what could she have done being what she is ?
> Was there another Troy for her to burn ?"

Further, he tried to justify revolutionary violence by blaming an unworthy age. She taught the ignorant masses "most violent ways", she taught them to "hurl the little streets upon the great", and it was quite natural for her to do so, for as he tells us in the present poem, "gangling stocks had grown great", and the "great stocks" had grown dry. It was a dangerous age, and her destructive activity was a natural consequence.

Now after closer contact with her, and more intimate knowledge of her temperament, the poet tries to explain differently the ambivalence within her personality. There was something superhuman within her ; she seemed to be guided and controlled by some stern destiny. She was a strange combination of the human and the superhuman. The bronze statue fittingly brought out this duality. Her face, as portrayed in the statue, was withered and mummy-dead, as the face of a human being actually is in old age. But her eyes were indomitably alive, and "in a grimly magnificent metaphor," he likens the glance of terror in her eyes to the terror of a lone bird which haunts a graveyard and whose own "inner emptiness is echoed and amplified by the emptiness of the heavens." Thus, the union of opposites in her personality—the human and the superhuman—is suitably brought out by the bronze statue.

The poet remembers the time when she was not at all like a tomb-haunter but had a different form 'full of the magnanimity of life.' She was then 'a most gentle woman', young and beautiful like a 'sleek and new' mare at the starting-post. Yet even then the poet had felt that there was a wildness in her eyes, as if she had 'a vision of terror' which had shattered her soul. It might have been the poet's imagination, or it might have been the truth about her. There can be no denying the fact that the soul is a composite substance and can unite within itself the extremes of life and death The end is often implicit in the beginning and the terror which haunted her eyes at the close of life was nascent in the wildness of her eyes at the 'starting-post', that is, at the beginning of her career.

Or, perhaps she was controlled and guided by some stern superhuman force which accounts for her glance of terror. She was not her own mistress, and her destructive activity resulted from some compulsion exercised upon her by some superior power. Thus, the poet presents one more aspect of the composite "human, superhuman" substance. Change is the law of nature, the wheel of history is constantly moving, and the present phase of civilization is running out. It has already grown foul and decayed as is seen in the general vulgarization of heroic values and the traditional way of life. The world is ripe for a massacre, and women like Maud Gonne are but the chosen instruments of destiny. She was fated to play a terrible destructive role in life, and this accounts for the wild look of terror in her eyes. As the poet puts it, "A vision of terror that it must live through had shattered her soul."

"*A Bronze Head* is a more striking poem, saying its farewell to Maud in a sombre, 'mummy-dead' landscape where the *hysterica passio* of the mob has become the *hysterica passio* of inner emptiness, echoed and amplified by the emptiness of the heavens. The 'dark tomb-haunter' memorialized in the bronze head has had other and more magnanimous forms. Yet, perhaps no form fully expresses the substance. Perhaps substance is composite, irreducible to a single principle, held in being between the extremes of life and death. The poem suggests this and then, before the proposition can become dominant, veers away to emphasize the unity behind apparent diversity. The end is implicit in the beginning. The terror which haunts the close of life is nascent in the 'wildness' of the filly, 'sleek and new' at the starting-post. We have, thus, two poetic forms of that composite substance, truth, and the final subtlety is to suggest that the poet does not know the truth that exists from the truth he has created. Imagination casts out everything that is not itself, and there is a wildness in the artist that answers and shapes the wildness of the subject. Then the perspective shifts again and the stern gaze of judgment expresses one more aspect of the composite, 'human, superhuman' substance. The 'foul world' in its decline and fall is farther than ever from being a second Troy. The verse strides authoritatively through in anger, and the monstrous alliteration of 'gangling stocks grown great' shows how fully alive the movement is to the passionate contempt which it conveys. The end comes in the ferocious paradox of the final alexandrine with that climacteric force of which few besides Yeats are capable."—(B. Rajan.)

The last line inevitably recalls *Purnell's Funeral*. Her beauty had stood as symbol for the lost ideal world he dreamed of, her actions had associated her in his thought with the thoughtless, destructive fury of the mob. This tragic cleavage in his life led him

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to evolve a coherent philosophy. He had tried to explain her revolutionary violence by blaming an unworthy age :

> "Why, what could she have done, being what she is ?
> Was there another Troy for her to burn ?"

So she could not have behaved differently from what she had because of her nature. Even then she had seemed to be manipulated by a superhuman destiny. Now he remembers how that same glance of the eye, in the full bloom of her beauty had filled him with forebodings not for himself but for her,

> "But even at the starting-post, all sleek and new,
> I saw the wildness in her and I thought
> A vision of terror that it must live through
> Had shattered her soul."

and the same thought returns, 'what could she have done, being what she is ? But now it is charged with all his reading of destiny and history, and he translates the meaning he had dimly understood in that 'tomb-haunting' eye :

> "Or else I thought her supernatural ;
> As though a sterner eye looked through her eye
> On this foul world in its decline and fall ;
> On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,
> Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,
> Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave,
> And wondered what was left for massacre to save."

5

BYZANTIUM

Introduction to the Poem

Byzantium was written as a sequel to *Sailing to Byzantium*. It was written after a lapse of about four years from the date of his composing the poem, *Sailing to Byzantium*. Yeats wrote his *Byzantium* in Italy after his Malta fever collapse. In the interval between *Sailing to Byzantium* and *Byzantium*, the poet had furthermore developed intellectually. Byzantium, therefore, is an improvement upon the earlier composition, *Sailing to Byzantium*, from the thought point of view. Like the former poem, in this poem, too, Byzantium is not the historical city of the Roman Empire, known for its mosaic work and gold enamelling, art and culture, but the country of the mind, a transcendental place outside Time and Space, a symbol for Paradise as well as Purgation.

Yeats's first notes for the poem are recorded in his 1930 diary, under the heading, 'Subject for a Poem', and are dated April 30, 1930. Some of them read : "Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millennium. A walking mummy flames at the street-corners where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbour, offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them to paradise."

The subject had been in his head for some time. Byzantium in the system of *A Vision* was almost a paradise. *Byzantium* further displays Yeats's use of complex and rich image and symbols, and the conflict between the real and the ideal aspect, between the natural and the supernatural, between the young and the old aspect of life.

The poem opens with a description of Byzantium after a wild revelry. It is night and all is quiet at the moment. The gong of the church has sounded, proclaiming the end of the day and the din and dash of its hectic activities. There had been a lot of drunken orgies throughout the day, but now all, including even the drunken soldiers of the king, have retired to rest. The echoing sounds of the daylong revelry and its unpurged images have all faded away. Even the peculiar night sounds are subsiding. Only the stately dome of the cathedral is there, dimly visible in the light of stars or the moon. The dome in its majestic grandeur seems to look down in contempt upon complexities of human nature and the fury and mire in human veins.

Having described the conditions obtaining in Byzantium—its drunken soldiery, its blood and mire, and the peace which apparently envelops the scene at night—the poet invokes the past and the dead. The peace at nightfall is deceptive ; for the sounding of the church-gong tantamounts to an invitation to the spirits of the dead to issue forth from their graves. An image appears before the poet, but it is not certain whether he is a man in flesh and blood or an apparition. This uncertainty adds to the air of mystery. The entire place seems to be a spirit-filled area. "Hades' Bobbin", 'bound in mummy-cloth', imply both the dead and the ageing facilitate the unwinding of the thread of time. The souls relieve in memory their earlier lives and thus re-suffer their earlier agonies. In this way, they seek to purge themselves of impurities. These ghostly spirits are superhuman entities, quite different from human beings of flesh and blood. Their mouths have no moisture and breath. But, as life and death are two sides of the same truth, so are the human and the superhuman interrelated.

The poet is led by one of these disembodied ghostly creatures to a mechanical golden bird perched on a starlit golden bough. This reminds us of the magnificent achievements of the Byzantium art and craft. The ghosts are proverbially associated with the crowing of cocks, and so the poet is reminded of "Hades' cock" which wakes up the ghostly denizens of the underworld The golden bird is immortal ; it is an emblem of art's everlasting beauty and purity. And as such, it looks down upon, like the dome of the cathedral in the opening stanza, human complexities of blood and mire. The purity and everlasting quality of art is contra-distinguished with the impure 'unpurged' human condition and its transitoriness.

These spirits are 'blood-begotten'. The Emperor's mosaic pavement is haunted by spirits at night. A fire unfed by fuel burns there at the time. The spirits purify themselves by dancing in this fire without getting burnt to ashes. It is a purgatorial fire, and the dance of spirits in it the dance of agony. That way the spirits seek to purify themselves of all complexities and fury through the process of self-expiation. The fire is of a mystic character. It cannot singe even a sleeve.

Spirit after spirit arrive on the shores of Byzantium riding on the back of Dolphins. The sea is rough and roaring, but it is held in check by smithies of the Emperor. Likewise, furies of complexity in the souls of the dead are held in check by their purificatory dance on the marble pavements of Byzantium. Images beget images in continuous confusion. They can be beaten into regular form by dint of art. The sea, torn by Dolphins and tormented by the sound of the gong, connotes man's life sundered by passion and desire.

Annotations, Word-meanings and Explanations

Stanza 1

Gist. The unpurged images of the natural world, the soldiers and night-walkers recede. Night resonance has also subsided. The starlit and moonlit dome of the cathedral looks down with disdain on all that man is.

Unpurged images—soldiers and others with unpurified souls.

'*Unpurged images of day recede*'—these day-images are apparently the ordinary objects of experience which make up the external world. If day may be the symbol for mortal life, and night for life after death, the grosser realities of day recede as the night approaches. Mr. T. R. Henn takes images in the Neo-Platonic sense. They are dross-covered reflected shapes of reality that fade as night approaches and mind grows strong again. They recede with the long closing streets, growing fainter in distance. Only at the end of the poem do we learn, says Ellman, that the day-images are made of the same stuff as the night-images. Night resonance also recedes along with the unpurged images of the day. If we take night resonance and the images of the day as the unconscious and conscious state, both kinds of states are to be eliminated in the deathlike trance which the poet wants to attain.

The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed—the drunken soldiery of the Emperor have gone to bed. That the soldiers of the Emperor are drunken is in itself an ironic paradox of the Emperor's empire. The phrase has its parallel in the same stanza in night-walker's song. 'The drunken soldiery' and the 'night-walker's song' have the overtones of contempt. They are also the drunken soldiery of *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.* This recalls the anarchy of *The Second Coming*, the brutal rape of Leda in *Leda and the Swan* and the murderous innocence of the sea in *A Prayer for My Daughter.*

In 'the Emperor's druken soldiery are abed', the false rhyme jars for an instant with the homely half-contemptuous word. 'Resonance', the dark heavy word, also becomes fainter in the distance.

Great cathedral gong—symbolizes the meeting of the religions of the East and the West. At the call of the gong everything (images of the day and of the night) recedes.

A moonit dome—the dome, like the dome of Saint Sophia, is Heaven, perfection, eternity, the white radiance of Shelley, a reversal of his 'dome of many-coloured glasses'. The dome is opposed to the natural world, the world of daylight, of passions, and flux. But the dome has other meanings also. Dr. Melchiori suggests that the dome is equivalent to Blake's cosmic egg and the sphere, the perfect shape, and that Byzantium has succeeded to Blake's city of art, Golgonooza. The dome, says D. I. Gordon, could be used as a symbol of arts and activities which should characterize a good society that favourite preoccupation of Yeats and his generation.

The dome disdains (the purity and scorn of moonlight is picked up late) not mankind, not the man, but 'all that man is,' the simplification of his complexities. It scorns all that man is, for man is of necessity incoherent, trapped as he is within the structure of the two opposing gyres that determine his nature. Man is a creature swept by emotion, the conflicting emotion, the 'fury and the mire of human veins.'

Complexities—the duality of man's nature.

Fury—the passion and violence in man's make-up.

Mire—the physical process of birth and death signifying man's kinship with clay ; transitoriness and insignificance of human life.

Explanation. The scene is the city of Byzantium at midnight. The architectural unity and beauty of the town is a censure on man's incoherence and mind and mood. The unpurged images of the day are, in all appearance, objects of experience making up the external world. If day may be the symbol for mortal life, and night for life after death, the grosser realities of the day recede as night approaches.

So the first stanza describes the scene when the great cathedral gong has sounded ; there are images neither of the day nor of the night. The drunken soldiers of the Emperor are in their bed ; the Dome of St Sophia looks down (disdains—there has been a great discussion whether the poet wrote 'distains' or 'disdains'—the second is mostly the accepted reading) upon all human conflicts. This is the simplified meaning of the stanza. To a deeper examination the meaning will be on a different level. The gong will then stand for some premonition of death. The Church of St. Sophia will stand for the image of Heaven : the Emperor's drunken soldiery will be the senses ; night resonances will stand for the unconscious. When a person is on the point of death, both the conscious and the unconscious minds are empty of all images. The poet has elsewhere written : "The Indian ascetic passing into his deathlike trance knows that if his mind is not pure, if there is anything there but the symbol of his God, some passion, ambition, desire or phantasy will confer on him its shape or purpose, for he is entering upon a state where thought and existence are the same."—(*Wheel and Butterflies*). The contending elements, "the fury and the mire", the struggle of the *Rajas*, *Tamas* and *Sattwa*, is over.

Commentary on Stanza 1

Richard Ellmann has pointed out that *Byzantium* is primarily a description of the act of making a poem. David Daiches has also said that Byzantium is a poem about art, about the making of poems, about the relation of art and life. Let us interpret the poem on this level too. On this level the Emperor is the poet himself. Byzantium itself is the ideal place of serenity where the mind can work unhampered. The unpurged images of day, the drunken soldiery, night-walkers' song are the gross realities of the world which should disappear before the poet writes. But the night resonance also recedes. The poet in the process of creation is at the highest climax of his living, in his ecstatic, visionary state the painful trance of frenzied joy. He is dead to the senses and the light of the world. He is the maker of the images, God-like, immortal. He is living, yet seems to be dead ; he is at the point of stillness. For him there is no day and no night. His state is timeless. The gong is his religion, his religion being his poetry. As the gong sounds, and the process of writing the poem begins, everything dross and unessential disappears and there remains the 'thing' itself. The dome, which is starlit, which sheds unchanging light, and moonlight which changes is nothing but the tower of the poet himself in which he is sitting and is looking from a great height the tiny creatures, fastened to their flesh, crawling slowly to their doom. Sitting in his tower and looking from a great height like a spectator with dispassionate and objective outlook, the poet disdains :

> "All that man is,
> All mere complexities,
> The fury and the mire of human veins."

Complexities are the first ladder which shall lead him to his tower, to the height of heaven. He writes in *The Circus Animals' Desertion :*

> "I must lie down where all the ladders start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."

As the poet tries to leave this beautiful world of complexities, and sails to Byzantium, he casts a long lingering look behind into the torn and tormented beautiful life, and the storm-tossed world of beauty, a world of Sligo, a world of beautiful, majestic, queen-like Maud Gonne, and passionate Diana Vernon who offered him joy and pleasure, the one the tragic joy, and the other a heaven in her lap. As the poet wants to cross the passion of the sea, the passion floods back in his heart. This conflict between the real and the ideal is the sustaining strength of Yeats's poetry.

Stanza 2

Gist. The poet sees in his vision a superhuman figure stripped of all windings. With the help of this superhuman figure he can attain the visionary state. He calls the figure death-in-life and life-in-death.

Shade more than man—the shade in a comparatively materialized condition, that is, a spirit, a visible ghost.

More image than a shade—a spirit that is quite invisible but can communicate with certain human beings.—(E. L. Black).

Shade more than man, more image than a shade—only the idea of a ghost, equipped not even with a ghost's substantiality.

Hades' bobbin—the thing that had once been a man, the purified spirit which has already unwound the winding path, of its human incarnation, and has dreamed itself back to its elemental form ; this image may breathlessly summon the breathless mouths of those spirits about to be freed from life's complexities and the round of incarnations. "Plainly speaking, 'Hades' bobbin' means soul."

Hades' bobbin......winding path—the rotation of an ordinary bobbin unwinds cotton thread. Similarly, the rotation of this supernatural bobbin unwinds bands of cloth such as are wrapped round a mummy. These lead one through the labyrinth of life as Ariadne's mummy as it unwinds its burial cloth, removes all that is evil or inferior and leaves behind the purified spirit. This Hades' bobbin was once a man, but now it is a purified spirit that has peeled off its human incarnations as a mummy might peel off its wrappings.

–(E. L. Black).

A mouth that has no moisture and no breath—is Hades' bobbin and superhuman. He may summon 'breathless mouths,' the dead spirits of the world who remove themselves to Byzantium for purification.

Breathless—dead. A distinguished critic says that even during life at moments of breathless inspiration, we escape from ourselves and our past, and summon the deathless, lifeless image which has no moisture and no breath. Thus, Richard Ellmann reverses the order. Instead of saying that "A mouth that has no moisture and no breath that is, the Hades' bobbin summons the 'breathless mouths', *i. e.*, the dead spirits," he says that the 'Breathless mouths' summon 'a mouth that has no moisture and no breath'. Breathless which means dead, he takes to be the moments of breathless which means dead, he takes to be the moments of breathless inspiration. And a mouth that has no moisture and no breath which is Hades' bobbin and superhuman he takes to be the deathless, lifeless image. It is not, according to him, the superhuman summoning us. We in this world, he says, sometimes in our most inspired moments become immortal (we become a mouth that has no moisture and no breath—an immortal being does not require moisture or breath). Ellmann does not think that Hades' bobbin is the superhuman and also death-in-life and life-in-death. He generalizes a philosophical statement that from the point of view of this life, such images are dead ; but from a more detached vantage-point, it is they that are immortal and the living who have no genuine life. What he means is that we in our life and death, we suffer from illusion. We think that we are living when really speaking we are dead. Our soul is imprisoned by the body, and this imprisonment is our death. We will have life in death, that is, it is only when we die that we shall be liberated from the clutches of flesh and ignorance and shall become alive in heaven.

Death-in-life and life-in-death—from our life's viewpoint, he is dead, but from the point of view of death, that is, when he is dead and liberated from periodic incarnations and stays in heaven where birth and death are unknown phenomena, he is alive. It is we who are dead in life, he in his death is living. We are ignorant, he has sought and come by wisdom. He is not faced by any conflicts or tensions. 'Is' or 'ought' do not exist for him. The dreamer's death-in-life has changed into the knower's life-in-death.

The poet invokes the past and the dead. The peace at night is deceptive. for the sounding of the going is a summon, so to say, to the spirit of the dead to come out of their graves. The poet sees an image moving before him, but he is not sure whether it is a man or a ghost. Everything is mysterious The entire place seems to be possessed by spirits. Hades' bobbin wound in mummy-cloth strip themselves of, the souls unwind the memories of their earthly existence, *i. e.*, relive in memory their earlier lives, and in this way re-suffer the earlier agonies. They, thus, seek purification through suffering. These ghostly, superhuman beings are quite different from the human, for they have a mouth without moisture and without breath. As life and death are two aspects of the same truth, so the human and the superhuman are closely interrelated.

Explanation. In this (second) stanza the poet sees an "image, man or shade" which he cannot properly identify, for it is neither exactly an image nor a shade. This is the soul of the dead and is unwinding the memories of its earthly existence. This is a superhuman figure ; this is death-in-life and life-in-death—reminiscent of Coleridge's :

> "The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she
> Who thicks man's blood with cold."

The poet imagines that when he dies he will be transported back in time to Byzantium. He will meet there a spirit who will teach him wisdom. We in our life are like the dead, for we suffer from illusion and ignorance, and are too much attached to the world. So it is only when we die that we shall be liberated from the clutches of flesh and ignorance. Whereas the superman is living even in his death, for he has sought wisdom, has no conflicts like ours.

This superhuman, according to Ellmann, becomes the creation of the poet's imagination. It is the imagination which is the purified soul. It shall teach him wisdom, make him immortal, and take him to heaven. It is really we (the poets) who call the Superhuman (Imagination). And the poet in the process of creating the poem attains the perfect bliss, and in his inspired moments of beatific vision he becomes, even though for a short time, immortal. The imagination gives coherence to things and resolves all differences. The conflict may lie in the mind of the poet. In the poem it is resolved. There remain no differences. Artifice and the Artificer in the end become one. The Dreamer's death in-life becomes the Knower's life-in-death. The poet and the poem become one, and the poet in his trance-like state annihilates all the differences of life and death. He is both dead and living. While he is living, he looks like the lifeless. He is at the still point in which the differences are annihilated. He is both living and dead. He is dead to the world around him, he being so absorbed. He is living, truly living in his death, dead to the world. He is life-in-death and death-in-life. (This is how Richard Ellmann interprets this stanza).

N.B.—(1) The idea of 'the mummy-cloth' was expressed in *All Soul's Night* :

> "As mummies
> In the mummy-cloth are wound."

(2) In "Shade more than man," etc., the comparatives emphasize the climatic authority. The comparative is again caught up in the next stanza '*Miracle, bird or golden handiwork*,' etc.

(4) The echo of the apparently paradoxical lines is a part of the technique for achieving cohesiveness. The paradoxical lines in the stanza are—

> "A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
> Breathless mouths may summon."

And

> "I call it death-in-life and life-in-death."

This is revealed in the fourth Stanza :

> "Flames that no faggot feeds nor steel has lit."

Stanza 3

Gist. One of these ghostly creatures (of the second stanza) leads the poet to a mechanical golden bird on a starlit golden bough. This miracle bird is in contrast with Nature or art. It scorns all complexities of mire or blood.

Planted on the starlit—glory of changeless metal. The golden bird is the redeemed human soul, for the purified soul becomes a golden singing bird permanent and spiritual, that scorns all human characteristics Hence, it is more miracle, more perfect than any miracle in nature or of man-made device. Hence, it is this golden bird which is sitting on the starlit golden bough in the palace of the Emperor. It either crows like the cock of Hades or scorns other birds and life. The cock as the herald of the sun became the herald of rebirth. The bird embittered by the moon scorns common bird or metal. The bird either crows like the cocks of the Hades, believing in the transmigration of soul, in the herald of rebirth, and announcing salvation for the benefit of all stricken souls ; or embittered by inconstancy of the moon, scorns aloud things that change, natural things like the common bird or petal, and the earthly mutabilities and sordidness that belong to the life of the flesh.

Hades—the unseen world ; the abode of the dead, ghosts and spirits ; hell.

Moon-embittered—vexed by inconstant moonlight. The poet has contrasted the constancy of starlight with the inconstancy of the moon, though both are reflected lights. Yeats considers starlight more constant than moonlight.

Mire—that is, the process of birth and death.

Blood—the unpurified state of Byzantium also that of modern European states.

Explanation. In the third stanza, the poet sees in his vision that this 'more shade than man', this ghost, takes him round and shows him a bird sitting on the starlit golden bough, the golden dome of St. Sophia, which scorns aloud all human complexities. It is also to be the poet's guide to death's dream-kingdom, and may introduce him to the inhabitants of Hades. In fact, this golden bird is the symbol of the purified, the redeemed human soul. This is why it is more miracle, more perfect than any miracle in nature or of man-made device. The bird embittered by the moon scorns common bird or petal. It crows like the cocks of Hades, for cock (here this bird) is the herald of rebirth, as the cock's crow is the herald of day. Hence, the bird either crows like the cocks of Hades believing in the transmigration of soul, in the herald of rebirth, and announcing salvation for the benefit of all stricken souls, or embittered by the inconstancy of the moon (the symbol of womanhood), scorns aloud things that change, natural things like the common bird or petal, and the earthly mutabilities and sordidness that belong to the life of the flesh. The golden bird is immortal ; it has the eternity and purity of art and as such, like the dome in the first stanza, it disdains human complexities of blood and mire. The purity of art and its eternity is contrasted with the impure 'unpurged' human condition and its transcience.

On the level of creation, as interpreted by Ellmann, the image of the golden bird may be understood to represent a poem. The bird sings as do Yeats's poems, either like the cocks of Hades of rebirth—the continuing cycle of reincarnating human life or with greater glory of enternal reality or beatitude which transcends the cycles' scorning the complexities, and fury and the mire. Never had the poet realized so completely the awesome drama of the creative act. The poet is distinguishing here between the birds (poems) that sing the common strain of the continuing cycle of human lives and those that scorn the cycle and sing only of escape from it.

Stanza 4

Gist. The poet has a look at the Emperor's mosaic pavement on which a fire fed by no fuel is burning and in which the souls of the dead purify themselves by dancing, without being burnt.

Flit—burn with a fluttering movement.

Faggot—a bundle of fuel sticks.

Steel—a piece of iron striking fire from a flint.

Flames begotten of flames—self-generating flames ; flames arising out of flames. As '*dome*' is the key-image of the first stanza, '*superhuman*' of the second stanza, the '*golden bird*' of the third stanza, so '*flame*' is the key-image of this (the fourth) stanza.

Blood-begotten—refers to the medieval belief that the spirits are begotten of blood. It also brings the memories of the blood and mire, and the violent experience of *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*.

Explanation. As the cathedral gong chimes the hour of midnight, restricting the time of the poem to midnight, the purgatorial immaterial flames painted in a mosaic (a kind of work in which designs are formed by small pieces of coloured marble or glass, etc, cemented on a ground of plaster or inlaid on metal) on the Emperor's floor, become vivid. So the poet has a look at the Emperor's mosaic pavement on which a fire fed by no fuel is burning and in which the souls of the dead purify themselves by dancing, without being burnt. They are ideal flames, not real or material. They are not fed by any fuel, nor do they need a piece of steel to strike a spark from flint. No furious storm can put them out ; they are flames begotten of flames ; they are the outcome of intense spiritual experience. In these flames are purified newly-arrived, blood-begotten spirits which have been carried to Byzantium over and across the seas of time and Space on the shoulders of Dolphins acting as their rescuers. And then starts the purgatorial dance of spirits. The dance has the effect of purifying the mortal experience of earthly life until all complexities of fury leave. The dance also breaks the chain of births and deaths and frees the soul from the grip of ever-recurring birth and death. In the course of the dance, the agony liquidates itself into trance, and what survives thereafter is unalloyed joy. But the achievement of trance costs a lot. The flame is not of material content, and hence, it cannot singe even a sleeve. The fire, therefore, is a mystic one ; it is the fire which exists in the minds of the sinners. Purification must be sought through suffering, through an ordeal of fire. Then alone can the human spirit be at rest. This is the Holy Fire which the poet had invoked in *Sailing to Byzantium.* It may be the purgatorial fire, or it may exist only in the minds of the sinners ; "if they can only overcome their remorse, jettison their past memories, their agony will cease to exist."—(F. A. C. Wilson).

On the level of creation, as interpreted by Richard Ellmann, this stanza deals with the process of artistic creation of the poem. Midnight offers peace to the poet. The Emperor's pavement is nothing but the poet's tower. Flame is nothing but the imagination of the poet. The faggot and steel suggest the immaterial quality of the imagination. The blood-begotten spirits are the raw material of the poet which he shapes into an artistic creation. Dance is the process of creation. Agony is inseparable from the act of creation but the result is a trance, an intense joy. And because the imagination is immaterial it cannot singe a sleeve.

The emperor/poet is busy in the process of creating a poem in his Byzantium tower, at midnight which offers peace necessary for mind at work. The flame which may be the Genius, Inspiration or Imagination of the poet is non-material in itself, it being only a quality. It cannot be disturbed by storms and upheavals. It is independent and is born of itself—flame begotten of flame, imagination begotten of imagination. The blood, begotten spirit is the impure, raw material of the poet. In the process of creating his poem (dance), he purifies the raw material of its impurity and complexity, imposes order on chaos, and makes it a work of art. In the process, agony is suffered by the poet. But the process of creation also gives an intense joy, a trance-like state. Imagination, however, cannot singe a sleeve because it is non-material.

Stanza 5

Gist. In the last stanza, the poet is taken, as it were, to see the great city. Like a person standing near a port who can have a look at ship-loads of people coming from far away, the poet can distinguish many people coming to his Byzantium on the shoulders of dolphins. In Greek mythology, the dolphin was sacred to Aphrodite and Poseidon, and was a symbol of fast movement. Since many people die every minute, the dolphins are represented as bringing loads of them into this holy city. As the loads of the dead arrive, the smithies of the Emperor get busy upon them ; the marbles of the dancing floor break the furies of complexity in those souls of the dead. "The sea is torn by dolphins and reverberates with the echoes of St. Sophia's gong ; the surface of man's life is split asunder by the passion of love and desire for perfection, and it is endlessly tormented by the idea of death."—(F. A. C. Wilson).

Astraddle—sitting astride.

Dolphins—animals of whale kind.

Dolphin's mire and blood—the dolphins with their mire and blood are the living bodies on which spirits ride to Byzantium across the sea of Time.

Explanation. The last stanza begins in great excitement and tension. The poet is standing in the city of Byzantium near the seashore. He is looking at the ship-loads of dead people coming from far away, from the twentieth century world, on the backs of the dolphins. In Greek mythology, the dolphin was sacred to Aphrodite and Poseidon, and was a symbol of fast movement. The dolphin is the saviour of human beings and ferries them to Byzantium on his back, crossing the turbulent sea, but it is also a love-beast. It is the connecting link between the two worlds, emblem of the dual nature of love. Spirit after spirit came crossing the dolphin-torn sea—the sea almost lapping the imperial pavement. As the loads arrive in this holy city, the golden smithies of the Emperor get busy upon them. They are golden because of their handiwork. There smithies break the flood which suggests confusion, irrationality, the 'Galilean turbulence'. The dance has already purified these images. The smithies impose order on them, breaking the flood of passion, the fury and the mire of the turbulent passion. The marbles (which stand for coldness, durability and pattern), share with the smithies the break, and impose a second order—order of measurement, and proportion upon the 'irrational stream'. The marbles of the dancing floor are associated with the dance of the previous stanza. These marbles of the dancing-floor break, (a) bitter furies of complexity, (b) those images that yet fresh images beget, (c) that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea. 'The mosaics on the floor where ritual dances were held, break the cycle in which the spirit is born and reborn in successive reincarnations.' They impose a pattern on complex, irrational force, and confused things, and 'put an end to the sources of confusion,' 'bitter' is linked with the 'moon-embittered' of the third stanza and suggests frustration. The furies grow out of irrational force. This is perhaps the sexual frustration of the images, and their complexity of tense conflicts that are forced into order and simplicity. As the dolphins ferry the dead across the sea of Life, they tear the surface of the waves. They also represent sensual existence. The gong strikes the midnight hour and is, therefore, the reminder of death. The sea of Life is torn with the sexual passion of dolphin, and tormented with the idea of death, perfection and religion of the gong. "They break 'that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea,' the sea is torn by the love-beast, the dolphin, and tormented by the gong, the religions that have met in the cathedral of St. Sophia, East and West."

The key-images in this stanza are golden smithies and the marbles of the dancing-floor.

On the level of creation, as interpreted by Ellmann, the dolphin becomes the duality in the poet, that aspect which links the real with the ideal. The smithies are the craftsmanship of the poet which gives order to the flood of passion. The smithies are golden because art is golden. Marbles of the dancing-floor is the shaping esemplastic imagination of the poet which breaks the incoherence, violence and confusion, and brings about order on disorder, and simplicity on complexities. When the poet begins to write images after images, spirit after spirit crowd upon his memory in a heap of disorder and confusion. It is a heap of broken images. The poet has to select and reject and hammer out (like the smithies) disorder and confusion—worst confounded, into an artistic pattern, and gives to airy things a substantial shape. The dancing-floor is also the rhythm that is the part of the poem. Dance is a state of trance. And it is only in this state that something immortal can be written. The poet expresses himself in images which beget other images. The poet explains his abstract thought in concrete images. And yet the crowding images are to be selected and rejected, and broken into proper shape. But though the poet wants to shape the passion into order, the passion revolts—the passion of the mire and the fury, passion of sexual desire and religion. The poet wants to transcend the flood of passion. But the passion floods back. The poet cannot ignore the life of the flesh even though he may be writing of platonic vision. The flood, the passion, the desire is the first ladder which the poet cannot ignore for reaching the heights. He writes in *The Circus Animals' Desertion*—

> "I must lie down where all the ladders start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."

The art has to blend the physical with the ideal. The poet may try to transcend the ocean of passion and desire, but the ocean remains torn by sexual desire and the tormented with the passion of religion. The dolphin-torn, the gong-tormented sea remains. It is the first ladder to the heaven of art.

A Critical Appreciation of 'Byzantium'—Background

Byzantium was a sequel to *Sailing to Byzantium* and was written in 1930, four years after its sister poem. Yeats was wearied of old age, and had recovered from illness. These Byzantine poems were prompted by his knowledge and study of the actual Byzantine art, his desire to escape from this world which was unfit for the old to a world of permanent art and culture, from a physical world to a spiritual and intellectual world. Whether prompted by history or by vision, W. B. Yeats writes : "I think if I could be given a month of antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato. I think I could find in some little wine shop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions... I think that in early Byzantium, may be never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one."—(*A Vision*, 1937, p. 279).

In December 1929, Yeats was close to death from Malta fever. "I warmed myself back into life," he tells us, "with *Byzantium* and *Veronica's Napkin*, looking for a theme that might befit my years." As stated by Prof. Stock, "At the end of *The Tower* and the two *Byzantium* poems eternity is winning after a fashion, for he writes as an ageing man preparing to leave the world of the senses."

Theme

According to Prof. Bullough, *Byzantium* is "a vision of the city from the inside where the soul is imagined first as a walking mummy and then as the Emperor's golden bird, whose 'glory of changeless metal is contrasted with the complexities of mire and blood'." Here Byzantium is a purgatory as well as a paradise, a place of cleansing flames :

> "Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
> Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flames."

So the poem is about the soul and its purification. The theme of the poem, broadly speaking, is the leaving of the world of flesh in search of wisdom. "The poet rejects, or is forced by old age to reject, the life of sensual music, of begetting and bearing, a world of procreation, which, because it is so, is also a world of that continually dies ; unwilling to be an old scarecrow or a dying animal, he seeks to 'make his soul' in its final form ; the metaphor he chooses for this is a golden bird singing in Byzantium upon its golden branch. This bird is the soul ; unlike the birds of the first stanza, is no longer subject to death ; it is a poet's soul that sings to lords and ladies ; it is an artefact (such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make) and therefore 'keeps a marble or a bronze repose', like the artefacts in *Among School Children* ; it cannot be betrayed by 'honey of generation'. *Byzantium* is superficially a more kinetic, but also a more obscure poem. In it Byzantium is seen as a purgatory ; on the one side the golden bird, the starlit dome, the purgatorial flame, the smithies where souls are wrought into images, the dancing-floor where they dance out their dance of expiation like the girl in the Noh Play ; on the other, the 'fury and the mire of human veins,' the drunken soldiery, the bloodbegotten spirits. The poem begins in the historical Byzantium which yet contains in it the antithesis that characterizes the visionary one, represented by the 'unpurged images of day' stressed against the starlit dome of Saint Sophia, an artefact ; in the second stanza the poet achieves the visionary state, unwinding nature and unwinding flesh, with the aid of his communication with an elemental spirit, a Daemon, that is itself stripped of all windings and is the bare, untrammelled 'thing itself' ; unaccommodated ghost. In his vision, the poet hails the sacred city or its principal symbol, the golden bird, 'miracle', the antithesis of nature, and describes the purgatorial process ; the arrival of the blood begotten spirits on the backs of dolphins, carriers of the dead in classical legend and sculpture, and their participation in a rite of purgation that is primarily a dance. This encounter of human and superhuman is described in great excitement and releases a flood of metaphors deeply interconnected in the long history of Yeats's imagination."—(Peter Ure, *Yeats*, pp. 72-73).

Byzantium and *Sailing to Byzantium* are a kind of debate which establish the dichotomy between the snares of the flesh and the unageing intellect. That country (this twentieth century world of ours) and Byzantium, the holy city are set against each other. The one is a world of the 'young in one another's arms', of love and romance of beautiful Maud Gonne and sex, of birth and death. The other is the breathless, thoughtless world of wisdom with its state of 'Nirvana'. This conflict, this dilemma has continued for long in his poetry. The poet is unable to decide. Unheard melodies are no doubt 'sweeter', but those heard, too, are quite 'sweet'. He can leave neither. Byzantium is sweet, but so is the world of Maud Gonne. There is no resolution or solution for long, till the poet becomes old and wise to strip himself of 'Maya'. Yet he is in love with both the worlds. This dichotomy between this world and that of Art and Nature becomes a personal symbol for Yeats.

Subject and Substance

The poem consists of five stanzas, each consisting of eight lines. The first stanza describes the scene when the great cathedral gong has sounded ; there are images neither of the day nor of the night. The drunken soldiers of the Emperor are in their beds ; the Dome of St. Sophia looks down on all human conflicts. In the second stanza, the poet sees an image, man or shade which he cannot properly identify, for it is neither exactly an image nor a shade. This is the soul of the dead and is unwinding the memories of its earthly existence. This is death-in-life and life-in-death. In the third stanza, this 'more shade than man,' this ghost, begins to remind the poet of the cock. This cock-ghost plants all human complexities. It is also to be the poet's guide to death's dream kingdom, and may introduce him to the inhabitants of Hades He takes the poet round and shows him a bird sitting on a tree. Then in the fourth stanza, the poet has a look at the Emperor's mosaic pavement on which a fire fed by no fuel is burning and in which the souls of the dead purify themselves by dancing, without being burnt. This is the Holy Fire, the purgatorial fire also. In the last stanza, the poet is taken to see the great city, Like a person standing near a post who can have a look at ship-loads of people coming from far away, the poet can distinguish many people coming to his Byzantium on the shoulders of dolphins. Since many people die every minute, the dolphins are represented as bringing loads of them into this holy city. As the loads of the dead arrive, the smithies of the Emperor get busy upon them ; the marbles of the dancing-floor break the furies of complexity in those souls of the dead. Meanwhile, "the sea is torn by dolphins and reverberates with the echoes of St. Sophia's gong ; the surface of man's life is split asunder by the passion of love and the desire for perfection, and it is endlessly tormented by the idea of death."

Interpretations

Byzantium poems are among the most difficult poems of Yeats. "Interpretations of *Byzantium*," says Dr. Rajan, "are varied enough to suggest that every reader makes his own poem from the same words. What is suggested here is that *Byzantium* deals with the tensions between change and the changeless, tension implicit in much imaginative experience and recreated memorably in the poem's language. It is because of this universality that *Byzantium* has its impact on those not deeply instructed in the vision and on those who remain unschooled in the subtleties of Platonic mysticism. This is not to deny that the modelling of the poem may be metaphysical or religio-philosophical ; but if disbelief is suspended in the presence of the poem, it is largely because the modelling seems to disclose the inherent form of a generally valid experience."

"The initial position in Byzantium is a decisive segregation of being from becoming. The 'sensual music' of an earlier poem has become the 'fury and the mire of human veins'. The starlit and moonlit domes of the first and fifteenth crescents disdain the 'mere complexities' of men's divided nature." Yeats in this poem is suggesting that, in the last resort, it is the creative mind which must instruct us in transcendent reality. And in this, one can see the echoes of Dante's address to Virgil.

"When the great cathedral gong (which Yeats may have read about in W. G. Holmes' *The Age of Justinian and Theodora*) has tolled its midnight summons to eternity, 'Hades' bobbin' wound in 'mummy-cloth' which (as in *All Souls' Night* suggests both the dead and the unageing) offers a means of unwinding the thread of time and the path of the gyres. The superhuman is totally beyond the human, a mouth without moisture and without breath. Nevertheless, it is involved in the human, as the gyres of life and death involve each other. Yeats's favourite quotation from Heraclitus, echoes, in the last lines of the stanza, drives home this embattled interdependence.

"In a correspondence which is by now celebrated, Yeats informed Sturge Moore that '*Byzantium* originates from a criticism of yours. You objected to the last verse of *Sailing to Byzantium* because a bird made by a goldsmith was just as natural as anything else. That showed me that the idea needed exposition.' Perhaps this admission should be read in the same way as Milton's statement that *Paradise Regained* was written to satisfy Ellwood. The qualities of the bird are justified by the necessities of the poem, necessities which arise from its almost passionate disengagement of the supernatural from the corruptions of the natural. Ellmann points out that Yeats would have learned from Eugenie Strong's *Apotheosis and After Life*, of how the cock became the herald of rebirth and was depicted as such on Roman tombstones. But, though the golden bird can crow like the cocks of Aades, the emphasis is rather on its scorning aloud the mire and blood of existence. Nevertheless the bird, even in its changeless glory, is 'embittered' and that fact keeps it tenuously but significantly linked to the 'bitter furies of complexity' which it disdains.

"Byzantium in Yeats's earlier poem was a place of stillness, of unageing monuments, of fire frozen into gold mosaic, of sages standing rather than spirits dancing, of equilibrium perfected in the artifice of eternity. In the later poem, the dance which is the climacteric symbol of the holy city is characterized by intense and tormented energy. The writhing movement of the 'f' and 'l' sounds in the fourth stanza encloses a scene in which the 'bloodbegotten spirits' leave 'fury' behind only to enter into 'agony'; and as the intensity of the agony is raised by the ritual repetition of the word itself and the alliterative link between 'dance' and 'dying', the climax comes in the realization that the experience, however overwhelming, is unreal, that the flames are incapable even of singeing a sleeve. Critics, from Ure onwards, have noted that Yeats has in mind the Noh play *Montemezuka* in which the torments of the sufferer are essentially self-inflicted. But what is also involved is the recognition that the experience of the totally transcendental cannot be related to that which it transcends. Mystic experience is beyond words and therefore can be engaged only tangentially with poetic experience that lives finally in words. To glimpse the quality of mystic experience, a struggle of the imagination is called for which in its nature cannot be sustained. What Vendler calls the 'shuddering poise' of the fourth stanza is an enactment of the struggle and of the inevitable defeat which follows from it.

"The last stanza moves the poem back into the natural world. Though the 'smithies break the flood' and the 'Marbles of the dancing floor break bitter furies of complexity'—the very word 'break' suggests a position under assault, a defence erected against an inundation. The emphasis is on the turbulent plenitude of nature, the images that beget fresh images (echoing in creative terms the supernatural 'flame begotten of flame'), and the 'spirit after spirit' upon the backs of the dolphins which, in the run of the poem, are like an advancing army. Yeats could have learned about his dolphins from many sources, including Hermes Trismegistus and Eugenie Strong. He also writes to Sturge Moore of 'Raphael's statue of the Dolphin' carrying one of the Holy Innocents to Heaven."

—(Dr. B. Rajan),

On the creative level the poem is a 'description of the act of making a poem'. David Daiches and Richard Ellmann hold this view. According to Ellmann, "The poet, who is precisely identified with the Byzantine Emperor, takes the welter of images and masters them in the act of creation. This mastery is astonishing to the poet himself that he calls the creation of his imagination superhuman. The image of the golden bird, 'more miracle than bird or handiwork' may be understood to represent a poem ; the bird sings, as do Yeats's poems, either like the cocks of Hades of rebirth—the continuing cycle of reincarnating human life, or with greater glory of the eternal reality of beatitude which transcends the cycles and all 'complexities of mire and blood'. Never had he realized so completely the awesome drama of the creative act."—(Richard Ellmann, *Yeats : The Man and the Mask*, p. 174).

On this level of creation, the Emperor is the poet himself, Byzantium is the ideal place of serenity where the mind can work unhampered. The unpurged images of day, the drunken soldiery, night-walker's song, the gross realities of the world which should disappear before the poet writes. The poet in the process of creation is at the highest climax of his living, ecstatic, visionary state. He is dead to the senses and the light of the world. He is the maker of the images, and is gold-like and immortal. His state is timeless. The gong is his religion, and his religion is poetry. As soon as the gong sounds, the process of creating poetry also begins then. The tower stands for the poet's own tower residence. Sitting in his tower and looking from a great height like a spectator with dispassionate and objective outlook, he disdains—

"All that man is
All mere complexities
The fury and the mire of human veins."

As the poet tries to leave this world of complexities, and sails to Byzantium, he casts a long lingering look behind into the torn and tormented beautiful life, and the storm-tossed world of beauty, a world of Sligo, a world of beautiful, majestic queen-like Maude Gonne, and passionate Diana Vernon who offered them, the one the tragic joy, and the other a heaven in her lap.

Hades' bobbin, the superhuman, is the poet's creation from imagination. Imagination is the purified soul. It shall teach him wisdom, make him immortal, and take him to heaven, the state of perfect bliss. Artifice and the artificer in the end become one. The Dreamer's death-in-life becomes the Knower's life-in-death. The poet and the poem become one, and in his trance-like state, the poet annihilates all the differences of life and death. The poet is both dead and alive—he is dead to the world around him and alive to the world of imagination, of soul, of peace and spiritualism.

The image of the golden bird 'more miracle than bird or handiwork' may be understood to represent a poem. The birds sing as

Yeats's poems, either like the cocks of Hades, of rebirth—the continuing cycle of reincarnating human life or with greater glory of the eternal reality or beatitude which transcends the cycles' scorning the complexities, and the fury and the mire. So the poet is distinguishing here between the birds (poems) that sing the common strain of the continuing cycle of human lives and those that scorn the cycle and sing only of escape from it. Here, says Richard Ellmann, are the two directions of the poet's own art.

The Emperor's pavement is the poet's tower. Flame is nothing but the imagination of the poet. The faggot, steel, etc., suggest the ammaterial quality of the imagination. The blood-begotten spirits re the raw material of the poet which he shapes into an artistic creation. Dance is the process of creation. Agony is inseparable from the act of creation but the result is a trance, an intense joy. And because the imagination is immaterial it cannot singe a sleeve. In view of this interpretation, the emperor/poet is busy in the process of creating a poem, in his Byzantium/Tower, at midnight which offers peace necessary for mind at work. The flame, the poet's imagination or genius, cannot be disturbed by storms and upheavals. The blood-begotten spirits are the impure, raw material of the poet. In the process of creating his poem (Dance), he purifies the raw material of its impurity and complexity, imposes order and chaos, and makes it a work of art. Imagination cannot singe a sleeve because it is non-material.

The dolphin, the poet's duality, that aspect which links the real with the ideal. The smithies stand for the craftsmanship of the poet which gives order to the flood of passion. Marbles of the dancing-floor stand for the imagination of the poet.

Art and Technique

Byzantium is wonderful from the point of view of the structure, technique and images. In his last poems, the creation had become for Yeats most important than the theme he was treating. In his earlier poems, the theme was more important than its treatment. In this poem, the theme and its treatment are wedded together.

In this poem, Yeats "evokes image after image, rooted in both the past and the present, interweaves them telescopically, and what emerges is not a heap of broken images, but a new poetic world." The images are characterized more by their overtones and total atmospheric quality than by any concrete meaning value. There are three main key-images in the poem, (i) the star-lit dome, (ii) the golden bird, and (iii) the flames on the Emperor's pavement. The gong stands for some premonition of death ; the Church of St. Sophia for the image of Heaven ; the Emperor's drunken soldiery for the sense ; night resonances for the unconscious. The cock-ghost is the symbol of the purified soul. The flame is the Holy Fire. The gold symbolizes purification through fire. But it also suggests 'the artifice of eternity'. The images of the day are unpurged and they recede.

These images of day symbolize the waking life with its petty and frivolous preoccupations. They are parallel to 'night-walker's song', all mere complexities, the fury and the mire of the human veins. They also suggest violence and recall the violence of *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*, the rape of Leda in *Leda and the Swan*, the murderous innocence of the sea of *A Prayer for My Daughter*, and 'the blood-dimmed tide' of *The Second Coming*.

The Emperor is not only the Emperor of the drunken soldiery, he is the poet himself. The cathedral gong is not simply a musical instrument, it is symbol of the state of purity, or as T. R. Henn says, the union of the religions of the East and the West. Thus, 'the patterns of symbolic meaning in the *Byzantium* are rich and rewarding'—(David Daiches). But the great thing about the poem is that the most casual reader can feel and enjoy it long before he measures the depth of the symbolic meaning. It is all the more significant when we know that 'the entire poem relies on the persistent reader's accumulated knowledge of Yeats's symbols.'—(Unterecker).

Yeats is very much interested in describing experiences through negations and paradoxes :

1. A mouth that has no moisture and no breath.
2. Flame that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit.

This is the best kind of rhetoric at work. It 'reinforces the poet's imaginative concept with details both evocative and authoritative.' It also holds through its use of symbols an immense amount of diverse meaning which can operate at different levels. Its almost incantatory repetition, and the interrelationship and building up of its images give it cumulative tension. The poem is most remarkable for the sheer bulk of its repeated terms "image", "gong", "mire and fury" shapes the poem. Unterecker has pointed out that thirty-five of the forty-five words of the last stanza appear at least twice in the poem, and three of the remaining ten words are closely related to others used in earlier stanzas.

Influences

Yeats's *Byzantium* poems are a fruition of his thought and study of the whole life. Besides a number of works on Byzantine art and mosaics, such as, O. M. Dalton's *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, W. G. Holmes's *The Age of Justinian and Theodora*, works of O. M. Dalton on Roman Empire and Byzantine Art, Yeats's philosophical, mystical, esoteric leanings are also hinted at in this poem. The golden tree with its golden bird reminds of Yeats's association with the Golden Dawn, its magical practices and the Tree of life. Cumont's *After Life in Roman Paganism* (1922), Angelo de Gubernatis's *Zoological Mythology* (1872), Eugenie Strong's *Apotheosis and After Life*, the Noh play *Montemezuka*, and above all Yeats's own philosophical work, *A Vision*, too have influenced his *Byzantium* poems. Influence of Vedant also is apparent from the philosophical connotation of the poem. The last stanza in the poem is a representation of a certain state of the soul's destiny in which many, Plato and Plotinus, the Sufis and the Mystics, some school of Buddhism and the Seers of the *Upanishads*, have believed. Byzantium of Yeats is the meeting-place of the two widespread systems of belief—the East and the West.

Drawback of the Poem

Though the poem is very rich and complex and can be read on many levels, it remains obscure even today. There have perhaps been as many interpretations as there are its sincere, critic readers. As W. Y. Tyndall remarks, "*Byzantium* remains an enigma even with the help of *A Vision* and of several explications, for although it has every appearance of unity, and although such images as the dome are readily intelligible, other images and their connections and references are as obscure as those of Mallarme. In Yeats such privacy is uncommon." Yet Stallworthy's observation too has a point to make, "No matter from what angle one approaches Yeats's *Byzantium*, and many critics have travelled by many different roads, its magic and mystery defy definition, and at every point one is aware of other levels and areas of meaning, still unexplored, just beyond the range of sight."

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6

A COAT

A Coat is one of the most important poems of the volume entitled *Responsibilities* It was occasioned by George Moore's derogatory criticism of Yeats in his (Moore's) memoirs, motivating Yeats to retaliate. Moore had criticized Yeats's physical researches, his pride in his family, his praise for the Lady Gregory and his love for Maud Gonne, and the realization of the importance of his work in his inaccurate memoir, and this provoked Yeats who defended those things.

Speaking about the background of this poem, Unterecker writes :

> "Irritated by George Moore's publication of his insulting and inaccurate memoirs, Yeats makes in this poem a defence of those 'priceless things'. Moore had attacked his psychic investigations, his pride in the family, his administration of Lady Gregory, his love for Maud Gonne, especially, his conviction of the importance of his own work......Though the visionary 'red-throated whisper', Yeats's ghostly adviser, no longer clearly manifests himself in air (Yeats no longer 'sees' him), though the whisperer is felt 'inwardly' and Yeats is able to 'surmise companions' in the spirit world......(the members of the Rhymers Club invoked in 'The Grey Rock'). Because of their studying presence and the aristocratic values he has discovered at Lady Gregory's home (Kyle-na-ne was one of the seven woods of Coole), he is able to bear the notoriety George Moore had imposed on him."

The poem called *A Coat* is at once a searching self-criticism and a manifesto of a new art which would no longer evade actualities :

> "I made my song a coat
> Covered with embroideries
> Out of old mythologies
> From heel to throat ;
> But the fools caught it,
> Wore it in world's eyes
> As though they'd wrought it.
> Song, let them take it,
> For there's more enterprise
> In walking naked."

The shorter poem, *A Coat*, written in a spare, bare, inimitably simple style, is at once an epitaph and a manifesto The poet made his songs a coat covered with embroideries of old mythologies, but now he prefers 'walking naked'. As C. M. Bowra suggests, Yeats turned away from Celtic imagery in horror, because the manner which he had invented from folklore and legend, all the vagueness and dreaminess associated with the Celtic twilight, had been borrowed and debased by a number of imitators.

Nevertheless, his search now would be for a variety of dramatic situations for the sake of this nakedness.

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7

THE COMING OF WISDOM WITH TIME

Yeats wrote *The Coming of Wisdom with Time* in 1909 when he was forty-four. The poem was included in the volume *In the Seven Woods* and *The Green Helmet.* In this poem, says A. G. Stock, a failing poet repeats patterns of thought and expression already mastered ; he does not teach himself a new idiom and a new range of feeling. And whatever else he overlooked, a critic might have been startled into alertness by the condensed force of *The Coming of Wisdom with Time.*

> "Though leaves are many, the root is one.
> Through all the lying days of my youth
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun :
> Now I may wither into the truth."

Here the paradoxes are drawn together. The association of art with age and withering, and of youth with vitality, abundance and natural beauty, are, of course, characteristic lines of force in Yeats's later poetry. They undercut the antithesis between truth and lying, making 'lying' suggest not only falsity and the indolence of youth but also experience lying dormant until it is awakened into art. At the other extreme of the contrast, age is a stripping away, a simplification, a concentration upon the one root instead of the many flowers. Yet it is the root from which the flowers and leaves grow. The price of wisdom may be bleakness and the price of life avoidance of the deeper reality. But the exclusions are not final ; they recover what is excluded in the total life of the image. (B. Rajan).

8

THE COOLE PARK AND BALLYLEE

An Introduction to the Poem

The Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931, appeard in the volume of Yeats's poems entitled *A Winding Stair and Other Poems*. The poem was written in 1931. It was occasioned by Lady Gregory's death, for whom Yeats had great regard and respect. She was living in the vicinity of the Coole Park and was the protector of aristocratic ideals and culture. By this time, Yeats had changed his stand. Previously he believed that Irish culture could be promoted and protected by the peasantry and common folk. But later on when he stayed at the Coole Park with Lady Gregory, he was convinced that Irish culture could be protected only by big houses like Lady Gregory's.

"Ballylee" in the poem refers to Thoor Ballylee—the ruined tower with the cottage below it, which Yeats purchased from the congested District Board for thirty-five pounds, and in which he composed most of his symbolic poetry.

Externally and at the simple level the poem describes the geographical surrounding of Coole Park and Ballylee and paints in words the whole landscape with its like and swans swimming in it. But as in other poems of this period, he is concerned with soul and its status or condition after death. Before this period, he had been in association with Mohini Chatterjee and had studied the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. Influence of these books and Indian Vedantism is apparent in the poem because on a deeper level the flow of water represents the voyage of soul from birth to death. The swan is also symbolic of soul.

Word-meanings, Annotations, Paraphrase, etc.

Stanza 1

Water's race—the speedy flow of water ; here it is symbolic of soul's voyage from birth to death.

Window-ledge—a ledge is a narrow horizontal shelf coming out from a wall, cliff, or other upright surface.

Otters—fur-covered, fish-eating water animals with four webbed feet and a flat tail.

Cellar—underground room for storing water.

Demesne—land ; estate.

What's water......soul?—water stands for the generated soul. The symbol is taken from Porphyra.

Paraphrase

(In Lady Gregory's house at Coole Park, the poet is sitting. Lady Gregory is sick and is about to die.) There are some window-ledges in the house. Under one of such window-ledges the water is flowing fast. Inside the water are otters (fish-eating water animals) and on the top are moorhens. It runs about a mile in a clear, crystal manner. Rushing past the tower, it plunges underground through dark Raftery's cellar. Having run underground, it rises at a rocky place in the estate of Coole, and there spreads into a lake. This water is nothing but the generated soul. Like water the soul is also rushing past the tower in the race of life, plunging underground into the death of dark Raftery's cellar (death) emerges, is reborn into the lake at Coole.

Stanza 2

Copse—coppice, small area of underwood and small trees grown for periodical cutting.

Ruskin—tragic drama ; tragedy.

Rant—talk.

Paraphrase

Upon the border of the lake's forest the poet did stand. The forest was all dry and barren on account of winter, and amidst some small trees of beech the poet stood. He found the Nature also in the same tragic mood and all phenomenon of Nature seemed to him a mirror of his own mood. As soon as the swan mounted, its sudden thunder and noise diverted his attention towards the glittering reaches of the lake where branches were broken.

N. B.—(1) The swan is another emblem of soul.

(2) In the flooded lake 'in the wintry sun' the stormy white, so pure, a dove mounts.—This is symbolic of soul's mounting towards eternity.

(3) The barren winter wood is emblem of the lifeless modern age which accentuates the element of contrast with the past with its "ancestral trees" and "the gardens rich in memory."

Stanza 3

Paraphrase

The swan is another emblem of soul. Stormily white and arrogantly pure, concentrating the heavens in its beauty, the swan rides the waters, belonging to them and yet aloofly above, the soul rides the stream of its own life. As it sails, the morning is gone, there is darkness (death), and no one knows the reason of this state (why has death occurred ?). Soul is so lovely that it sets right the excess or lack of knowledge. Soul is so pure and white that even a child might think that he can spoil or murder its whiteness with a spot of ink. [Soul can be defiled even by the tiniest or least of evils or passions (sins)].

Stanza 4

Paraphrase

This stanza is a direct reference to Lady Gregory's physical condition, and her room and other belongings. The 'dry sticks' remind the poet of Lady Gregory. The sound of the stick with whose help Lady Gregory moved from one chair to another in her restless condition in the room adjacent to W. B. Yeats, reminds the poet of Lady Gregory. So he remembers of old marble heads of the sculptors, the paintings and the books collected by her, and the rooms where every visitor got content or joy. Here is a house where nobody has ruled or reigned, where life has been without fear, full of true freedom ; no one has ever committed any folly here. This house has produced great and noble persons like Lady Gregory, Major Robert Gregory, Hugh Lane, etc. It has nourished arts and culture.

Stanza 5

Paraphrase

Coole Park and their house whereon the founders of it lived and died seemed more dear than life. Ancestral trees, or gardens rich in memory, glorified marriages, alliances and families. There every bride's ambition remained satisfied. It was there that fashions were cultivated, decrees were obeyed, imagination was enriched, where man shifts about—all that glory spent—like some Arab tribesman and his tent with the fall of the house and all it stands for inhuman thought three thousand years of ordered imagination are flickering into the dark, and the swan is homeless.

Stanza 6

This stanza is quite significant in the development of Yeats's thought. Dr. Rajan observes, "The last romantics (romantics because committed to an irrecoverable past of sanctity and loveliness, they set their faces against the coming reality) look upon a landscape where 'all is changed', where the 'high horse' of poetry is without a rider, and where the swan, no longer in control of its destiny, drifts on the darkening and engulfing flood." "From the swan to Homer by way of these last lines is an easy transition, for where the swan led, the poet followed. Homer is his ideal poetic self, as appears in a pregnant answer given by the heart to the soul in *Vacillation*." —(A. G. Stock). According to Prof. Stock the phrase "mounted in that saddle Homer rode" reminds us of Helen and then, in turn, Maud Gonne. "From Homer to Helen ; and Helen's beauty is inseparable in his thought from Maud Gonne's and thus, symbol is interwoven with living experience."—(Stock).

[*N. B.*—Please also see the last few paragraphs of the 'Critical Appreciation'].

A Critical Appreciation of 'The Coole Park and Ballylee'.

"Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" is a symbolic poem. But the symbols in this poem speak for themselves. When Yeats wrote this poem, Lady Gregory—confined to her second-floor room—was dying.

Though she will die, but her artistic achievement and the tradition established by her will remain immortal. The dry sticks,

> "Sound of a stick upon the floor, a sound
> From somebody that toils from chair to chair,"

old books and paintings all remind us of Lady Gregory. Her house was a distinguished house, the house that contributed a great deal to Ireland, to its freedom struggle, and produced great figures like Major Robert Gregory and Hugh Lane. This house was a cultured house which produced not only great artists like Lane and Lady Gregory, but also great heroes and freedom fighters.

This is a poem in the romantic-cum-symbolic tradition. It consists of six stanzas of eight lines each. The first three stanzas, on the ordinary level of meaning, draw the landscape on which Lady Gregory's house was situated, the last three stanzas refer to Lady Gregory and her family. The poem ends wsth a note that thought the house (of Lady Gregory) may fall, but her artistic achievement, her family's contribution to Art and Irish National Cause cannot die.

Nevertheless, *The Coole Park and Ballylee*, written in 1931, "is a meditation interacting two themes : the soul, whose symbol is a swan, and the glory of a great ancestral house."—(A. G. Stock). Prof. Stock further adds, "With the fall of the house and all it stands for in human thought three hundred years of ordered imagination are flickering into the dark, and the swan is homeless. It ends :

> 'We were that last romantics—chose for theme
> Traditional sanctity loveliness ;
> Whatever's written in what poets name
> The book of the people ; whatever most can bless
> The mind of man or elevate a rhyme :
> But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
> Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
> Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood'.

Prof. Stock's interpretation of this poem is based on the theory of the symbols of "Leda and Swan" where Swan stands not only for Zeus but for a specific period of human civilization of two thousand years. Miss Stock also finds echoes of Helen and Maud Gonne.

The Coole Park and Ballylee is rich in symbols. The stream or water which runs near the tower, passes through dark Reftery's cellar, "runs underground, and rising again in 'Coole demesne' enters into a lake." The journey of water represents the voyage of soul from light into the darkness, from birth to death, and is again incarnated. Another symbol of soul is the swan. In the flooded lake in 'the wintry sun', there is the 'thunder of the mounting swans'. The stormy white so pure and joy-giving sail like soul.

Having compared soul to water and swan, Yeats introduces the third imagery. The winter wood denotes the present which has been contrasted with the past, the rich and the glorious past of Coole. The barren winter wood is emblem of the lifeless modern age which accentuates the element of contrast with the past with its 'ancestral trees' and 'the gardens rich in memory'.—(See Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats*, p. 202).

So on the deeper level the poem is symbolic of soul's journey from birth to death, from light to darkness. The poet seems to be under the influence of Vedant, of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, and regards soul as immortal and white without any spot. It is like the swan which mounts and mounts, or like the generated stream which flows clear crystal :

> "Another emblem there ! That stormy white
> But seems a concentration of the sky ;
> And, like the soul it sails into the sight
> And in the morning's gone, no man knows why :
> And is so lovely that it sets to right
> What knowledge or its lack had set away,
> So arrogantly pure, a child might think
> It can be murdered with a spot of ink."

And in the last lines of the poem they re-echo, giving fuller meaning to his lament for the passing of romantic poetry :

> "But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
> Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
> Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood."

"It is not a different swan," says Prof. A. G. Stock, "standing for a different idea each time, nor yet a code-word for a fixed idea, but the same swan acting in different ways, much like a living bird ; there is a cluster of thoughts which affect each other, and now one, now another is in front.

"From the swan of Homer, by way of these last lines, is an easy transition, for where the swan led, the poet followed. Homer is his ideal poetic self, as appears in a pregnant answer given by the heart to the soul in *Vacillation* :

> *Soul.*—'Look on that fire, salvation walks within.'
> *Heart.*—'What theme had Homer but original sin ?"

And he bids farewell to Von Hugel with

> 'Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.'

"For by the standards of Christian asceticism all that glorying in passionate experience, summed up in the swan, is changed into the lust of the flesh, and the lust of eyes, and the pride of life. From Homer to Helen ; and Helen's beauty is inseparable in his thought from Maud Gonne's and, thus, symbol is interwoven with living experience. The pattern of the tapestry is inexhaustible. It is partly this intricacy that gives Yeats's later poetry its intense power ; it fills the simple words with deep, half-discernible meaning."

The language and emotion, the imagery and the picturesqueness, the natural scene, water, otters, moorhens, swans, lake, branches, dry sticks, all speak of a romantic quality. The simplicity of language and subjectivity, the union of the natural and the supernatural, the metaphysical touch, the tragic, melancholy note and the lament for romantic poetry can safely convince us to regard this poem even at a matured and later phase of Yeats's poetry as one of the best romantic-cum-symbolic poems. The poet also intensifies the effect of his poem by introducing the element of contrariety and conflict by bringing in the hidden suggestions and ideas through his symbolic uses of words, and by alluding to episodes from his own and the lady Gregory's life by inserting his own philosophy of spiritualism, expressed three main images in different stanzas.

There is the imagery of contraries too. The waters run *underground*, then *rise in a rocky place*, *spread to a lake* and then *drop into a hole*. Then there is the imagery of colours—white and dark—both symbolic of soul's conditions. The swan is 'arrogantly pure', the reach of the lake is 'glittering', but the Raftery is 'dark', the sticks are 'dry'.

"The poem," says Pater Ure, "continues to be controlled both by the landscape and by the impulse of mind." In an elegiac strain, he describes the house at Coole Park, the books bound by hands, old marble statues, old pictures and the great rooms where travel-weary men found contentment. It was a place of peace and creative joy.

"A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life ; ancestral trees
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families."

The old mansion is tottering and the cracks are manifest everywhere. Old culture and the heritage of values are lost and anarchy prevails :

"We shift about—all that glory spent—
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent."

The last few lines are full of pathos and humanity. Speaking about his purpose, the poet says that his object as an artist is not to lull an indolent conscience, but to depict the life of the people, to link up actions with principles and to apply great ideals to a wide human field :

"We were the last romantics—chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness."

The heritage of innocence, sanctity and loveliness is lost. The contact between the people and the arts is shattered. So there is anarchy apprehended :

"But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood."

In a world of anarchy and chaos, vanished hopes and shattered illusions, the poet calls the honey-bee and the birds to build their nests in the tower. The masonry, however, loosens and the dead young soldier rolling in blood on the road haunts his imagination :

"A barricade of stone or of wood ;
Some fourteen days of civil war ;
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood."

9

CRAZY JANE TALKS WITH THE BISHOP

An Introduction to the Poem

In the Spring of 1929 Yeats tells us, "Life returned to me as an impression of the uncontrollable energy and daring of the great creators......I wrote *Man as the Mist and Snow* and after that almost all that group of poems called, in memory of those exultant weeks, *Words for Music Perhaps*." In a letter written on 9 March, 1929, Yeats informed Lady Gregory that he had written five of *Twelve Poems for Music*. By 29 March, he claimed to have written ten, and by 13 September the number planned for the series had risen to thirty with over half of them already composed. Yet the very rate of his progress filled Yeats with doubt ; "I am writing more easily than I ever wrote and am happy, whereas I have always been unhappy when I wrote and worked with great difficulty." Yeats's dates may not always be trustworthy, but Eilmann's chronology shows that several of the poems on Crazy Jane were written before *Byzantium* and that virtually all of them (as well as the poems on 'Tom the Lunatic') were written before *Vacillation*. Their appearance after the latter poems is one more reminder that the aesthetic order is not the chronological.

Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop is the most celebrated and popular poem in the Crazy Jane sequence of poems included in the volume entitled *Words for Music Perhaps*. There are seven poems on Crazy Jane. The central mood of these poems is earthiness. They also represent sexuality. Yeats himself said about these poems that he was motivated to write them by sexual urges during his illness. "Sexual abstinence fed their fire. I was ill and yet full of desire. They sometimes came out of the greatest mental excitement I am capable of."

Crazy Jane, Yeats told Olivia Shakespeare, was founded upon an old woman who lived in a little cottage near Gort and who had an 'amazing power of acidulous speech'. She was, he added, 'a local satirist and a really terrible one' :

> "She loves her flower garden. She has just sent Lady Gregory some flowers in spite of the season and has amazing powers of acidulous speech – one of her queer performances is a description of how the meanness of a Gort shopkeeper's wife over the price of a glass of porter made her so despairing of the human race that she got drunk The incidents of that drunkenness are of an epic magnificence. She is the local satirist and a really terrible one.—(Yeats wrote to Olivia, *Letters*, p. 785).

But some doubts have been expressed as to whether the origin of Crazy Jane is quite so simple as this statement suggests. In previous versions of the poems, she is referred to as Cracked Mary, a creature whom Yeats mentions, as early as 1904, and whom he treats as the source for the song in *The Pot of Broth* that refers to 'Poor Jack the Journeyman'.

In any case, having created his character, Yeats found it amusing to think himself possessed by her. "I have begun a longish poem called 'Wisdom'," he wrote to Olivia Shakespeare, "in the attempt to shake off 'Crazy Jane' and I begin to think that I shall take to religion unless you save me from it." To his wife he was even more emphatic : "I want to exercise that slut, Crazy Jane, whose language has become unendurable." The exorcism seems to have been effective and Yeats, who was probably never scandalized, eventually found himself converted. "I approve of her," he told Olivia Shakespeare. As for the poems themselves, he declared provocatively : "Sexual abstinence fed their fire—I was ill and yet full of desire. They sometimes came out of the greatest mental excitement I am capable of." Yet if intellectual excitement fed the poems it did not determine their fundamental character. "I want them to be all emotional and all impersonal," Yeats wrote elsewhere. He described them as the opposite of my recent work and all praise of joyous life. The characteristic qualification of these poems is that 'in the best of them it is a dry bone on the shore that sings the praise.'

Word-meanings, Annotations, Paraphrase, etc.

Stanza 1

Gist. A Bishop exhorts Jane, a woman of deranged and crazy mind to live a pure life free from dirty sensuality.

Those breasts......now—signs of old age.

Those veins......dry—the fervour of blood will soon be on the wane.

Heavenly mansion—godly way of life.

Foul sty—dirty sensuality, as unclean as a pig sty.

Paraphrase

A Bishop meets Crazy Jane on the way who exhorts her to mind her ways and lead a proper, virtuous life. She is growing old, her breasts are flat and fallen, and her veins would soon be dry. Therefore, she should lead a more virtuous and religious life and not a life of the beastly sensuality, as dirty, and obnoxious as a pig sty.

Stanza 2

Gist. The woman (Jane) replied that fair and foul were closely related.

Fair and foul..... pride—good needs evil, is true. The low bodily desires are as necessary as the lofty sentiments of pride.

Paraphrase

Crazy Jane, the common slut, is not at all perturbed at the advice of the Bishop. She tells him that fair and foul, good and evil, body and soul, are equally necessary, and life is completed by the union of such opposites. Life becomes an organic whole and derives its significance and value only when both body and soul work in harmony. Body is not to be shunned: physical pleasure is also an essential truth of life. The body must not be starved or sacrificed for the sake of the soul.

Stanza 3

Gist. Crazy Jane tells the Bishop that a woman is full of pride when swayed by sentiments of love. But love attains its fulfilment in the place of excrement.

Proud and stuff—think highly about.

But love......excrement—but love seeks its fulfilment in the union of baser parts of the body.

For nothing......rent—not even virginity of a woman is complete unless she is deflowered.

Paraphrase

Crazy Jane tells the Bishop, who advised him to give up evil, that the good and the evil are the essential ingredients of life and the good exists only in conjunction with evil. Love is a noble passion, something good and desirable, but this noble love has pitched its mansion in the place of excrement. We cannot deny the one and accept the other. Wholeness or completeness can be achieved only when the foul is accepted along with the fair. As F. A. C. Wilson explains, virginity itself finds its consummation and significance only when it is 'rent' or violated.

A Critical Appreciation of 'Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop'

Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop is one of the major and important poems in the Crazy Jane sequence of poems included in the volume of verses entitled *Words for Music Perhaps*. The poem was written after 1929 (perhaps in 1932). Crazy Jane is the poet's spokesman for a life where sex is to be accepted on the same footing as other more elevated aspects of life. The sixth poem in this sequence is entitled *Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop*.

The poem is in three stanzas. Each stanza contains six lines. It is a brisk and hard-hitting dialogue of this Crazy Jane (who is a slut, a terrible satirist) and the Bishop. Even in her old age, she is after the sexual life. A Bishop reprimands her and tells her that her "breasts are flat and fallen now ; those veins must soon be dry"—

> "I met the Bishop on the road
> And much said he and I.
> 'Those breasts are flat and fallen now,
> Those veins must soon be dry ;
> Live in a heavenly mansion,
> Not in some foul sty'."

—And, therefore, she should live a more religious life, advises the Bishop. Instead of feeling ashamed, she turns savagely on the Bishop and maintains that love (or, lust, to be more precise) should be accepted as an important part of life. She gives her argument a philosophic twist. She points out that love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement, and ends with the statement of the Platonic of opposites ! "Every quality cries out to be combined with that which is most alien to it, and without contraries is no progression. The consummation of virginity lies in its desecration, just as the consummation of divine order lies in its reconciliation with the fallen world."—(F. A. C. Wilson). Crazy Jane's philosophy is Yeats's own philosophy of those days—

"Fair and foul are near of kin,
'And fair needs foul,' I cried.
'My friends are gone, but that's a truth
Nor grave nor denied.
Learned in bodily lowliness
And in the heart's pride."

The soul can realize the Unity of Being through fair and foul. Jane is for the wholeness of experience which cannot be split in terms of body or spirit As Dr. B. Rajan has observed, "Actually satire and sluttishness are not the outstanding qualities of the series, and even the much-vaunted sexuality of the poetry needs to be accepted in its context if it is not to obscure the central meaning. It is more legitimate to regard the essence of Crazy Jane as her derelict dignity in the face of circumstance, a kind of heroic inviolability amid the humiliations of the blind man's ditch. More fundamentally, however, Crazy Jane represents the conviction that the truth can only be possessed in time and that to live the truth man must consent to live it whole. The validity of experience resides in its completeness, and one can only mutilate that completeness by forging it into the categories of either body or spirit. Again and again Jane expresses the sense of wholeness, the recognition that opposites need each other to contemplate themselves, a recognition consummated in the act of love, which remains the stubborn centre of her wisdom. Love is like the lion's tooth, eloquent also of anger and of the rage to destroy. If it stoops short of total possession, if it is unable to

'......take the whole
Body and soul',

it remains not partially, but totally unsatisfied. Fair and foul are near of kin-flesh and spirit demand each other, and

'......nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent'."

Through the mouth of Crazy Jane, the poet has succeeded in driving home the truth that body and soul are God's creation, hence, the two are equally holy. The claims of the one must be denied for the good of the other. Rightly says Prof. A. G. Stock, "And in *Words for Music Perhaps*, more especially in the mouth of Crazy Jane, he puts his profoundest metaphysical vision into snatches of song. To put a philosophy in homely terms and sing it light heartedly takes completer understanding than any other way of expounding it. Crazy Jane is the final test of Yeats's faith."

Yeats has juxtaposed two opposites—experience and ideas. B. Rajan has remarkably observed : "The sense of wholeness as the union of opposites is reinforced by the dramatic convention, the contrast between protagonist and circumstances, between the inviolable insight and the repeatedly violated body. It is underlined by the ironic convention, the wisdom of those whom the world calls half-witted and the reversal of apparent values as the bishop turns into the coxcomb he condemns. Finally, it is strengthened by the linguistic convention, the deliberate contrast between the spiritual understanding and the phallic phrases. These incongruities bind the poems together, opening into and subtly validating the greater incongruity of its central recognition, the sense of permanence in the midst of change. Crazy Jane does not hunger for Byzantium, nor does she bless everything that she looks upon ; but she knows that the tree and the moon that is hung upon it grow out of the apparent waste land of the heart."

And below are given the remarks of Peter Ure, another outstanding critic of Yeats :

"Many of the poems in *Words for Music Perhaps* were written in the Spring of 1929, on the rebound from serious illness. 'I want them to be all emotional and all impersonal,' he wrote. '......I am writing more easily than ever I wrote and I am happy, whereas I have always been unhappy when I wrote and worked with great difficulty. Crazy Jane is a dramatization of that casting out of remorse which was celebrated by the Self in *A Dialogue for Self and Soul* and of the Lunatic's faith in *Tom the Lunatic*—

'Whatever stands in field or flood,
Bird, beast, fish or man,
Mare or stallion, cock or hen,
Stands in God's unchanging eye
In all the vigour of its blood ;
In that faith I live or die.'

So Crazy Jane argues with the Bishop, relying not on God but on sensual energy and heroic joy. But the sweetness of her triumph in forcing old age to accept all the natural life of youthful desire, all its conditions and memories, is conveyed in rhythms that are tempered and made poignant by the imminence of death, the basic dramatic situation is that of a lonely, wild-even persecuted, old woman, whose lover Jack, the Journeyman, once straight and wild and young, is long since folded into the pathos of the dead. This situation qualifies the heroic self-possession of Crazy Jane, her wit and joy ; and elsewhere in the group there is sorrow at the transfiguration of time...... Although Crazy Jane's splendour reflects the creative excitement and energy that Yeats experienced in making the poems, this mournful note sounds behind 'the urgent conviction of the *persona*, who spits into the face of time, and comes 'proud, open-eyed, and laughing'— to the tomb."

"But Crazy Jane," says Richard Ellmann, "is not so wild as she appears, or as Yeats pretended, as the last two lines indicate, she shares his theories about love, and sees it as a conflict of opposites but also as an escape from them to unity, wholeness, or, to use a word which she would not have used, to beatitude. Her testimony is doubly valuable because she has never read a book. Though she prides herself on her licence she is tightly controlled by her creator, and, when her promiscuity begins to persecute his imagination and her language to 'become unendurable', he exorcises her from his verse."

This poem, however, shows a new aspect of Yeats's poetry—a vigorous and passionate zest for life with a curious mingling of the sensuous and the cerebral, which found its consummation in the heroic, defiant, ironical gaiety of *Last Poems* (1936-1939).

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10

A DIALOGUE OF SELF AND SOUL

Introduction to the Poem

A Dialogue of Self and Soul is one of the important poems included in the volume *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933). In the poems incorporated in this volume, there is concentration on rebirth and stress on life, whereas in *The Tower* poems, Yeats is more concerned with the spiritual world and the realm of the soul. *A Dialogue of Self and Soul* reveals Yeats's attention to life, or his concern with health. As Richard Ellmann has traced Yeats's concern with health between 1926 and 1932 : "Health now became a major concern. Twice during the years 1926 to 1932, Yeats was close to death, the first time in Dublin in October 1927, when he hardly expected to recover from congestion of the lungs ; the second time at Rapallo in December 1928, when he contracted Malta fever and was critically ill for almost four months. Minor ailments, beginning with a slight rupture from exercise followed by what he called the 'ignoble complaint' of measles in 1926, combined with almost chronic long trouble and high blood pressure to make the process of living more difficult and more precious. A death moved perceptibly closer. Yeats's mind turned in self-defence, as it were, towards life ; the moods of his poems changed and a stream of blood imagery poured into his verse like a transfusion."

A Dialogne of Self and Soul is an autobiographical poem. Yeats himself tells us, "*A Dialogue of Self and Soul* was written in the Spring of 1928 during a long illness, indeed finished the day before a Cannes doctor told me to stop writing. Then in the Spring of 1929 life returned as an impression of the uncontrollable energy and daring of the great creators ; it seemed that, but for journalisms and criticisms, all that evasion and explanation, the world would be torn in pieces. I wrote *Mad as the Mist and Snow*, a mechanical little song, and after that almost all that group of poems called in memory of those, exultant weeks *Words for Music Perhaps*......" In fact, *The Dialogue* is the autobiographical record of the same experience which a year after, in the greater detachment of convalescence, Yeats projected into the dramatic characters of Crazy Jane and Tom the Lunatic. The poem is a mystical statement of Yeats's acceptance of this life with all its pettiness and tragedy, and a rejection of every kind of asceticism and renunciation of life. As death moved closer to him, the poet turned, as if in self-defence, towards life.

A Dialogue of Self and Soul is a conversation between the Self-and the Soul. The Soul does not want that the imagination of man should remember things connected with love and war, it wants to liberate itself from birth and death. But the Self wants to live even though the life entails misery and hardship. There is sweetness in the troubles and miseries of life.

Word-meanings, Annotations, Paraphrase, etc.

PART I

Stanza 1

The winding ancient stair—the winding stair symbolizes the difficulties and obstacles which must be overcome before the 'top' or the 'tower' symbolizing 'wisdom' or 'ancestral darkness', or a "solitary retreat" can be reached. It is a symbol of the path of escape, a direction in which man is permitted to move in that phase of the moon when all thought is finished, the blacked out moment at dark of the moon.

The steep ascent.........battlement—symbolizes the difficulties which must be overcome before absorption in the Absolute, and the deliverance from the cycle of birth and death can take place. The steep ascent is that of heaven.

Breathless starlit air—air in which no one breathes, the air beyond the physical. The 'air' is only starlit, *i. e.*, the sky is dark, symbolizing the darkness of the soul. 'Breathless' here means beyond life, 'Nirvana'.

Hidden pole—the pivot of truth and the starlit sky from which the moon of self is absent.

That quarter where.........done—the Infinite and the Eternal which is beyond human thought.

Who can distinguish..........Soul ?—the soul's condition is darkness. Beyond and around the temporal there is 'timeless darkness', and absorption in this darkness is the mystic's goal, for it is this absorption alone which can deliver one from the crime of birth and death. Yeats had been reading Plotinus for sometime, and this mystical way of escape from the material might have been suggested by his reading.

Paraphrase

The Soul urges the Self to ascend the winding stair and reach the tower, that is, to overcome all the difficulties of the path to eternity and reach God to unite with Him. On reaching the top, the Self should fix its eyes upon the star which marks the hidden pole (Truth) and concentrate its attention upon the Infinite, the Absolute, the Eternal, who is beyond human thought, who can distinguish between the dark and the light. This type of action can free the Self from the bondage of birth and death and can bring 'Nirvana' for it.

N. B.—In Part I of this poem the soul reiterates the escapist appeal of *A Vision*. The Soul urges the Self to follow a direction in which man is permitted to move in that phase of the moon when all thought is finished, the blacked out moment of dark of the moon.

The 'breathless' which is totally beyond life, 'the hidden pole' which is the pivot of truth and the 'starlit sky' from which the moon of self is absent, all indicate the condition of phase one where, with the self annihilated, the plenitude of reality overflows and pours into the inert basin of the mind.

Stanza 2

Sato's ancient blade—the sword which the poet had upon his knees was five hundred and fifty years old, and was given to him by Juazo Sato, during his American tour in 1920. It was fashioned by one Montashigi. "Sheathed in its scabbard, still razor-keen and unspotted by the centuries, the combination represents the looking-glass and the embroidery of art, the energies that survive time, love and war, and the masculine and the feminine."—(B. Rajan). Thus, the sword is seen here as a symbol of masculinity, life and war, and so is the Self, for the sword is the emblem of Self.

Razor-keen—extremely sharp.

Unspotted—free from rust.

That flowering............and round—according to Yeats's own diary the sword was covered with a 'Japanese lady's court dress'. The dress is now tattered because of being centuries old, still it can protect the sword-sheath and make it look beautiful even with its faded finish and colour. Again, the sword may be taken as a vital principle and the lady's dress as the body enshrining it.

Paraphrase

The poet's Self replies to the Soul by pointing towards Sato's sword upon the poet's knees. The sword's blade is still sharp and spotless and without rust, although it is centuries old. Its wooden scabbard is wrapped in a silk cloth, richly embroidered with flowers. It must have torn from the dress of some fashionable court-lady. Though faded and torn, it can still protect the will to action. It is emblematic of war. The scabbard wrapped in embroidered silk symbolizes love and the eternity of art. Together the two stand for the acceptance of life, or 'Maya'. The poet's self rejects the soul's offer of escaping from this world to the world beyond, and accept life and its activity as it is.

Stanza 3

Ancestral night—the eternal darkness which surrounds the temporal world on all sides. The mystic desire is for absorption in this darkness, for such absorption alone can deliver the soul from the cycle of birth and death. The soul of the individual comes from this absolute darkness, and hence, its condition also is one of 'darkness'.

Paraphrase

The soul reminds the poet (Self) that he is no longer a young man. Since he is old, he should no longer think of the sword and its embroidered cover, for they are symbolic of love and war. Such activities and such thoughts are fit only for young men. He should rather think of the timeless darkness that surrounds the temporal on all sides. He should scorn the life on earth, and concentrate his thoughts on the eternal darkness alone that can free the soul from the crime of death and birth.

N.B.—In this stanza the soul again persuades the Self to accept the winding stairs and leave the things 'that are Emblematical of love and war'. The Soul urges the Self that it should reject the Sato's sword (which is an emblem of love and war), and think of the ancestral night (the ancient winding stair, the tower which is like eternal darkness which here is the symbol of the day). If only the imagination of man rejects the sword and this earth, and the intellect of man hates 'this and that and the other things,' and embraces the ancient winding stair, he shall be freed from the painful cycles of birth and death. He will possess the breathlessness, mindlessness, the state of 'Nirvana.' The soul's condition is darkness and the acceptance of this darkness (symbolic of the eternal light) is deliverance from the misery of birth and death.

Stanza 4

All these—the sword, scabbard, the dress, the purple flowers embroidered on it. These are emblematic of the day, whereas the tower is emblematic of the night. The poet prefers day to night.

A soldier's right—the Self of the poet has always been a fighter, a soldier, and, therefore, as a soldier he claims the licence to fight again to live in the world.

Paraphrase

The Soul's summon is for a withdrawal from life for an ascetic rejection of life ; the Self, on the other hand, accepts life and its activity. Pointing to Sato's sword, the Self tells the Soul that the sword was fashioned by one Montashigi five hundred and fifty years ago. The sword and its cover embroidered over with beautiful flowers are symbols of day, while the tower to which the Soul summons the Self is emblematic of night. The Self rejects the night and chooses the day. It is determined to use the sword like a soldier and commit the crime of birth and death once more.

Stanza 5

Fullness—overflow of happiness, exuberance resulting from the realization of reality ; Platonic ecstasy.

That quarter—the thought of eternal darkness surrounding the earthly life.

That man is......blind—the senses are overwhelmed by the realization of truth.

Paraphrase

The Soul replies to the Self by pointing out the blessing which results from a contemplation of the Enternal. Man's mind overflows with exuberance. He senses and the intellect separates 'is' from 'ought' and 'knower' from the 'known', but now all such distinctions are obliterated and there is a realization of the essential oneness of all.

But the realization of his truth means temporal death ; it means absorption in the Eternal darkness which is Heaven. The very thought of such bliss makes the tongue incapable of speech.

N.B.—In this stanza the Soul again persuades the Self to leave this world and embrace the heaven (the winding stair) which overflows with sweet wholesomeness and which, falls into the depth of mind, thus making the mind sweetly wholesome filling in with the bliss of beatific vision. When the Self is annihilated, the plenitude of reality overflows and pours into the inert basin of the mind. But the price of revelation is the death of personality. Man is stricken blind, deaf and dumb. The revelation and enlightenment are dark. The acceptance of the dark deliverance leads to a kind of dark enlightenment in which unitive apprehension of 'Is, Ought, Knower and Known,' is achieved. It is only here in this world that intellect differentiates between these things. In heaven there prevails wisdom, sweetness, wholesomeness, synthesis. The annihilation of these differences which only ignorance begets means ascending to heaven. But though we can enjoy this revelation we cannot speak about them. As soon as one thinks of telling that revelation, one's tongue becomes a stone. He can no longer speak.

PART II

Stanza 6

Ignominy—disgrace ; dishonour.

The unfinished man—the boy, or man with all his imperfections.

Brought face...........clumsiness—rebuked and humiliated by frequent reminders of his clumsiness.

Paraphrase

The soul at first appears to have blessedness as its exclusive preserve, and offers it with confidence that the Self has nothing so good. But at the height of the rivalry the Self realizes, it has a blessedness of its own, a secular blessedness : this discovery is called forth by the heat of battle, and enables the Self to triumph.

So in the triumphant mood the poet examines his past life with a note of confidence and recklessness. The poet is fully aware of the difficulties and evils of life. He knows that it is difficult to grow and progress, that the period of boyhood is one of ignominy, that there is much distress in the change from boyhood to manhood, and that the unfinished man, the boy, is clumsy. He also knows that life is impure, as impure as a ditch of stagnant water, but still he accepts life and rejects the Soul's summons.

Stanza 7

The finished man—that is, matured man.

The mirror of malicious eyes—eyes that reflect malice like the image reflected from a mirror.

Wintry blast—frosty wind in winter that affects the greenery in gardens and groves adversely.

Paraphrase

The grown-up man finds that he has enemies on all sides who malign him and blacken his eyes. Eyes malicious, like distorting mirrors, misshape his image till he begins to imagine that he is really ugly and awkward. And thus, in his turn, he spoils the image of others. But to seek to escape from this scandalous situation is no good. Life with all its blots and blemishes is to be preferred. An ascetic life is barren like a wintry blast.

Stanza 8

To pitch—to take a headlong plunge.

Into the frog-spawn......ditch—the frogs breed and scatter their eggs in dirty spots, as a blind man's ditch is likely to be.

Fecund ditch—a ditch fertile, rich and sweet into which a blind man falls The allusion is to his (poet's) blindly falling in love with Maud Gonne.

Not kindred of his soul—made of different stuff not in harmony with his inner self.

Paraphrase

The poet firmly declares his will to accept life with all its defects and drawbacks. Even though life be as dirty and disgustful as a blind man's ditch full of breeding frogs, he would not shun it. He admits that he was stupid enough to love a self-willed woman who did not reciprocate his love and made him feel miserable thereby, still he chooses to live earthly life once again and drink the cup of sufferings and sorrows which it characteristically offers.

Stanza 9

To follow to its source......in thought—living this life intensely and fully.

When such as I......is blest—this is a mystic sentiment. The poet in his essay, written in 1910, enunciates the basic theory of such mystical sentiments and experiences thus—"There is the creative joy and acceptance of what life brings, or a hatred of death for what it takes away, which arouses within us, through some sympathy perhaps with all other men, an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock in the terror and sweetness of our exultation at death and oblivion."

Paraphrase

The poet's Self rejects the Soul's summons and reasserts his determination to live again, and yet again. The poet commits himself to rebirth. His life has been one of sorrow and suffering, but he is ready to forget it all, and live his life once again from the very beginning. He has cast out all regrets from his heart, and has accepted life and his lot. As a result of this full and unreserved acceptance, such a sweetness has flowed into his heart that he wishes to laugh and sing, and considers himself, and everything around him, as blessed. This is a mystic experienc, and all those, who accept life, as the poet has done, can enjoy it.

A Critical Appreciation of 'Dialogue of Self and Soul'

A Dialogue of Self and Soul was written during the severe illness of the poet in 1928, and was incorporated in the volume entitled *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*. It is an autobiographical poem, as the change in the tone of the poem has been ascribed to the poet's serious illness, his long disease and high blood pressure which made him feel that he would not survive. The result was that the poem is full of blood images and concerns with health. Most of the poems in the title, *The Winding Stair*, concentrate on rebirth and stress on life whereas the poems in *The Tower* are mainly concerned with the spiritual world and the realm of the soul.

A Dialogue of Self and Soul is rather a long poem of seventytwo lines, parcelled out into nine stanzas of eight lines each. It is made up of two parts. It is an autobiographical expression of a conflict between the soul of the poet and his mind or intelligence. The outcome of it is the poet's whole-hearted acceptance of the earthly life with all its evils and miseries and rejection of asceticism and escapism. The conflict has been dramatically put forth in the form of a dialogue.

In the first Part of the poem, the soul of the poet tells his self or ego (or, mind) to fix every wandering thought upon that quarter where all thought is done. It holds out the hope that if imagination discards the earth, ancestral night can bring about release from the crime of birth and death. In response the self holds up Sato's sword as an emblem of love and war, and claims the right to commit the crime of birth and death as befits a soldier.

In the second Part of the poem, the pretence of impersonal debate is given up as Yeats speaks out in his own person. He commits himself to rebirth in an impassioned outburst in which the clumsiness and calumny, failure and frustration of life is affirmed with daring intensity so that its sweetness can be vindicated. Notwithstanding all that slurs or scandalizes life the poet is prepared to be reborn and live his earthly life once again. In his present life, the poet committed the worst folly, that of loving a self-willed woman, no kindred of his soul, and suffered terrible mental anguish in consequence, but he has no regrets and is disposed to forgive and forget. He wills to be reborn and to follow once again to its source every event in action or in thought.

Life is sweet, and its acceptance brings with it its own blessings. Just as discarding life in pursuit of an ascetic aim leads us in sweetness which is so very exuberant that he must laugh and sing. The flowing of sweetness into the breast is a mystic experience. This mystic experience is further highlighted in a letter in which the poet speaks of it as an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock, in the terror and sweetness of our exultation, at death and oblivion.

Thus, the poem is the vindication of Yeats's belief in the acceptance of life. It is a conversation between the self and the soul.

The soul does not want that the imagination of a man should remember things connected with love and war. The soul speaks that if his imagination can scorn the earth, he will free him from rebirth and bring him to heaven. But the self is for life and has its own emblems. Yeats depicts swords as the emblem of the self. Sato's sword, sharp like a razor and shining like a mirror, is sheathed in a silken scabbard. The symbols of sword and scabbard referred to in the self's dialogue represent love, war and art. They stand for the day whereas the soul is for the darkness. The tower is emblematical of the night ; the winding stair of the difficulties that one has to come across while journeying to heaven. Further, the soul symbolizes liberation from birth and death, whereas the self symbolizes active involvement ; the former represents escape, the latter its complete engagement with 'Maya'.

"If the 'consecrated blade' and its scabbard are emblem of the day, the tower is an emblem of 'ancestral night'. The soul's condition is darkness and the acceptance of that darkness is deliverance from the 'crime' of death and birth. It also leads to a kind of dark enlightenment in which unitive apprehension of '*is, ought, knower* and *known*' replaces the separation of the intellect. The 'breathless air' which is totally beyond life, the 'hidden pole' which is the pivot of truth, and the starlit sky from which the moon of self is absent, all indicate the conditions of phase one, where, with the self annihilated, the plenitude of reality overflows and pours into the inert basin of the mind. But the price of revelation is the death of all personality (man is stricken blind and deaf and dumb), and thinking of that revelation the tongue becomes a stone. The ambivalence of the symbol is exactly judged. The stone stands for death and the commitment to rebirth is a kind of dying to absolute reality ; but the inherent tendency of the stone is downward into the only life that is humanly possible.

"Building upon this ambivalence the self commits itself to rebirth in an impassioned outburst in which the bitterness of life is affirmed with daring intensity so that its sweetness can be vindicated. Few poets, apart from Yeats, would accept so spectacular a risk, and there are some who argue that the risk was beyond him, that the conclusion is imposed on the poem, instead of developing from it. Such a conclusion underestimates the irony of the soul's claims ; it also ignores the subtle, but clearly intentional links between blindness of soul and the blindness of self, the forgiveness that is bestowed upon the dead and the forgiveness achieved by a deeper living of life, the 'fullness' that overflows into the minds of the dead and the 'sweetness' that flows into the breasts of the living. What Yeats is suggesting is not the obvious point that life is worth living even at its most bitter. Rather it is his familiar proposition that what we know of ultimate reality is only known to the extent that it is lived."

Briefly speaking, this admirable poem of Yeats is his record of the rejection of the mystic's deliverance from life, through absorption

in the timeless Absolute. A. G. Stock rightly remarks that the poet "stares at life's reality," with its necessary suffering and necessary retribution, and, "like a boy, who decides that the apples are worth the thrashing, makes the hero's or the artist's choice of life after life, experience for itself." But to Dr. B. Rajan, the poet is not suggesting the obvious point that life is worth living even at its most bitter. "Rather, it is his familiar proposition that what we know of ultimate reality is only known to the extent that it is lived." In spite of an obvious ambivalence, the poem expresses the poet's immeasurable lust for life.

11

EASTER, 1916

Introduction

Easter, 1916, is one of those poems of W. B. Yeats which relate to the contemporary themes. The poem was written on September 25, 1916, and appeared in the volume entitled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). The theme of this poem is the Dublin uprising of 1916. The Irish people stood up in rebellion against the British for Independence. The uprising was crushed by the British army; people were executed *en masse*; their leaders arrested and put to death. The event impressed William Butler Yeats very much, not for its appropriateness, but for its bravery and heroism. Even the people, whom he had once regarded as black sheep, proved to be wonderfully great heroes and martyrs. The Easter Rising could be seen, not as an isolated incident, but as a part of history. Yeats was not quite persuaded to believe that all that bloodshed was wise, but he was convinced that the "late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one may say of its wisdom, will long be remembered for its heroism." Although he did not think of patriotism as a very good or suitable subject of poetry, yet in the presence of heroic action he could not remain dumb.

Word-meanings, Annotations, Paraphrase, etc.

Stanza 1

Them—the Irish people.

Counter—counters of shops.

Desk—signifies office.

Meaningless words—words of conventional kind, such as, 'good evening', 'good morning', 'good day', etc., which have no deeper meanings beyond formality.

A mocking tale—an account that provokes laughter.

A gibe—a taunt.

Motley—a jester's parti-coloured dress.

A terrible beauty—something laudable and yet grim and gruesome; patriotic death. Tragic dignity has returned to Ireland.

Paraphrase

The poet draws the picture of the people of Ireland before the Easter Rebellion of 1916. The life of the Irish people was running on an even keel. It was full of fun and frivolity. The poet used to meet people coming out of shops and offices among the 18th century old houses, and used to greet them with a nod of his head and with words of mere formality, such as, 'good-morning', 'good-evening'.

He also used to narrate, to entertain his companions at the club some ridiculous tit-bit or make someone the target of his taunt. He was certain that all of them were living a life of mixed colours, like the dress of a jester. But all that suddenly changed into what was glorious and yet terrible—"a terrible beauty is born".

N.B.—"From the tone one would never think that any heroic theme was being taken up. He keeps strictly to the bare facts and makes no attempt to read any heroics into them. If any one is the hero, it is a town, quietly going about its normal work. The actors of that drama are also ordinary people ; the poet has often met them in the evening ; he has often exchanged polite meaningless words with them ; sometimes he has made fun of them. They seemed so ordinary. In the poem, the first eighteen lines are employed to recalling these commonplace facts, and the poet is surprised that he was so mistaken about the possibilities latent in these, his fellow citizens. 'A terrible beauty is born' and all is changed 'suddenly'."

Stanza 2

That woman's days—the woman referred to was Countess Markiewicz who was once a beauty, but now was passing her time in 'ignorant good-will' and pleasant conversation. She was a famous politician, took part in the Irish Rebellion of 1916, was sentenced to death, but was released in 1917, and lived to be a member of Parliament and, later on, of the Irish Lower House. She died in 1927, full of honours. Seven lines from 'That woman's' to 'harriers' (from the beginning of the stanza) are devoted to her.

Ignorant good-will—unscrupulous benevolence, or an indiscreet favour.

Her nights in argument—Countess Markiewicz spent her nights in conversation—debating and arguing.

Her voice grew shrill—her voice became sharp and shrewd.

Harriers—the name of a club (or, hunting).

This man—the schoolmaster, Pearce. Two lines from 'This man' to 'winged horse' are devoted to him.

Winged horse—swift horse.

This other his helper and friend—Connolly who took an active part in the Rebellion.

This other man......vainglorious lout—famous, awkward, proud John MacBride, Yeats's successful rival in love, who had married and later on divorced Maud Gonne.

Lout—awkward fellow.

Number him—include him.

Song—poem.

Casual comedy—occasional hilarity.

Paraphrase

In this Dublin Rebellion of 1916, a beautiful woman, named Markiewicz, grown shrewd, a schoolmaster, Pearce, and his friend

Connolly, forsook their individual roles and fought with a unified aim of winning freedom for their country. Countess Markiewicz's participation in the Rebellion turned her from a beautiful woman to a busy, shrill and shrewd talker who was now passing her time in 'ignorant good-will' and pleasant conversation, attending meetings in clubs and other public places. Pearce kept a school and was fond of riding swift horses. Pearce's friend, Connolly, was really a rising star. There was promise in him. He might have won fame in the end. His nature seemed sensitive ; he was daring and his thought was sweet. Then there was a person whom the poet had regarded as a 'drunken vainglorious lout', an awkward proud man, Sean MacBride. He was a comic character, a sort of fool, he too got suddenly changed in the Rebellion, and from a fool he came to be regarded as a hero. It was a miracle that patriotic self-sacrifice could work. The result was that 'a terrible beauty was born.'

Stanza 3

Paraphrase

The poet instead of idolizing these impulsive people, sees them a fanaticism not quite desirable. To Yeats these so-called martyrs were patriotic theorists who had sacrificed their lives for an abstract idea. Their union was like a stumbling stone in the moving and living stream of life. The stone, in fact, does not change or transform. So hearts dominated by a single purpose are 'enchanted to a stone' troubling the living stream. These people's heart too could not be transformed, although from their outward appearance they seemed to have changed. (They sacrificed themselves in an attack of passion). There may be change on all sides. The horse that comes from the road, the rider, the birds have been changing every minute. A shadow of cloud on the stream also changes. But the stone in the stream is unchanged.

Stanza 4

Paraphrase

The men who act like these heroes become callous like stones. The poet now asks whether all this great sacrifice was necessary. Although we may and should remember them one by one, like a mother who names her child after its death on limbs that had run wild. Their act is like a nightfall, not night but death, a consummation, an end. Their death did not achieve its aim and might even have been needless, for England may keep its promise of freeing Ireland after the First World War is over. Was the exchange of living flesh and blood for the graven glory a fair exchange after all ? The heroes died for some dream. They were bewildered by excess of love for their country and faced them, and so they sacrificed their lives in a passion, were executed and put to death—all the sixteen men, including MacDonagh, MacBride, Pearse and Connolly. They stand transformed. It is perhaps better to think that their excess of love for their country blinded them. But one thing is clear that wherever green is worn (wherever there are Irishmen) the names of these great patriots will be remembered with respect and love. They are no more to be thought of as ordinary men. "A terrible beauty is born."

A Critical Appreciation of the poem 'Easter, 1916'.

Yeats was in Dublin at the time of the Rebellion of Easter, 1916. He was deeply moved by the heroism and the martyrdom of the insurgents. He had little sympathy with their political methods, but with a true poet's insight he saw that the whole Irish scene was transformed by the tragedy of their execution. Now he no longer writes of contemporary Ireland with scorn or irony, but of the common life of Dublin irradiated by the magnificence of tragedy :

> "I have met them at close of day
> Coming with vivid faces
> From counter of desk among grey
> Eighteenth century houses.
> I have passed with a nod of the head
> Or polite meaningless words.
> Or have lingered awhile and said
> Polite meaningless words,
> And thought before I had done
> Of a mocking tale or a gibe
> To please a companion
> Around the fire at the club,
> Being certain that they and I
> But lived where motley is worn :
> All changed, changed utterly ;
> A terrible beauty is born."

The heroes of the Rebellion, Pearse, Connolly, Macdonagh and MacBride, now become symbols of heroic martyrdom, and Yeats, perhaps alone among modern English poets, succeeds in creating a truly poetical myth out of contemporary politics.

About this poem, Dr. B. Rajan has made the following observations : "When the Easter Rising of 1916 broke out, Yeats was staying with the Rothensteins in Gloucestershire. He was personally acquainted with the leaders in the tragedy ; he had visited Pearse's school, read and admired MacDonagh's book on Gaelic influences on English poetry, worked with James Connolly and the Wolfe Tone Memorial Committee, and had lost Maud Gonne to John MacBride. His reactions to the disaster seem to have been mixed. Home quotes him as speaking to Rothenstein of innocent and patriotic theorists carried away by the belief that they must sacrifice themselves to an abstraction. On the other hand, he wrote to Lady Gregory, in May, that he had no idea that any public event could move him so deeply. Echoing Maud Gonne's thought 'tragic dignity has returned to Ireland,' he said : 'I am trying to write a poem on the men executed : terrible beauty has been born again.' In July 1916, he was still divided between admiration for the bravery of the uprising and doubts its wisdom. 'Romantic Ireland's dead and gone' sounds old-fashioned now. It seemed true in 1913, but I did not foresee 1916. The late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom, will long be remembered for its heroism. 'They weighed so lightly what they gave' and gave too in some cases without hope of success.

"*Easter 1916*, was published by Clement Shorter in an edition of twenty-five copies. Ellmann lists two other poems on the uprising, *The Rose Tree* and *Sixteen Dead Men*, as written on 7 April and 17 December respectively. All the three poems were withheld from the general public until 1920, when they appeared in the November issue of *The Dial* along with six other poems, including *The Second Coming*. *Easter 1916*, had been first printed slightly earlier in the *New Statesman* of 23 October.....

"*Easter 1916*, the most distinguished poem of the trio, is formally associated with *September*, *1913*, not only by its similarity of title but by its dating of 25 September (of twenty-eight poems dated in *Collected Poems* eighteen are dated to the month). In its content the later poem takes back the earlier. Yeats had for too long lived within a political cartoon in which passion and precision were one in the big houses, in which the peasantry was full of instinctive poets and in which the commercial and contemptible middle-classes added Biddy's half-pennies to Paudeen's pence. MacNeice's conclusion that big house culture consisted of nothing more than 'an obsolete bravado, an insidious bonhomie and a way with horses' can be and has been disputed, but to point out that Yeats's diagram is not wholly without a basis is not really to justify it. Fortunately, *Easter 1916*, is not a poem of sackcloth and ashes ; it is a poem deeply troubled by the knowledge that heroic action can have more than one implication. The middle-class men coming from 'counter or desk' known only in the exchange of 'polite meaningless words', the schoolmaster who once belonged 'to the noisy, set/That martyrs call the world', the 'drunken vainglorious lout' who had bitterly wronged those close to Yeats's heart, are all capable of a deeper life below the 'motley' and the 'casual comedy', a radical transformation of their appearance. But the deeper life is a divided life. Hearts dominated by a single purpose are 'enchanted to a stone' troubling the living stream. The word 'enchanted' minimizes the apparent disapproval and in the vital central image, where the minute-by-minute life of the stream is perfectly seized in the description and movement, the sudden recognition comes, that heroic action, however obsessed, is inalienably part of the life that it troubles :

> 'Minute by minute they live :
> The stone's in the midst of all.'

All this point, indeed, the manipulation of the imagery, gives the stone permanency in the midst of transience, and, with the very next lines—

> "Too long a sacrifice
> Can make a stone of the heart'

underlining the other evocations of 'stone', the balance is complete and fully achieved poetically. It is characteristic of the subtlety of the imaginative reasoning that the heart's stoniness is born of the emotional fervour of sacrifice, but, characteristically also, this implication is cut back before it can develop to the detriment of the balance......The poem is, in fact, typical of Yeats's achievement, in which the images in the poetic organization, both challenge and amend each other, creating a total life that exists only and fully in the terms that are chosen. In these circumstances the refrain 'A terrible beauty is born', is not, as Knights concludes, an escape from full realization or 'a lapse into something like Yeats's earlier manner', but a consummation of the forces at work in the poem. With *Easter 1916*, and with *Responsibilities* behind him, Yeats has completed his emancipation from the twilight, has securely achieved the self conquest that is style, and has fought his way into the twentieth century."

The 'I' in the poem is Yeats himself; for once a poet without a mask, *Easter 1916*, is a very ambivalent poem as we should expect. The literal meaning is easy enough to grasp, since the whole purpose of the poem is to state it. Yet the poet thinks one thing, but feels another. The poem belongs to his middle period; all the ornateness of his early style has been left behind. The diction is almost bare and unobtrusive. The words seem to be the components of a picture or of a great building. The poem possesses a remarkable lyrical intensity. The poem has no metaphysical level, and the poet is seen devoted to the expression of his vision of abstract reality. He is more easy to understand in poems of a more earthly intent like the present one.

In this poem, the poet uses only his speaking voice. From the tone one would never think that any heroic theme was being taken up. He keeps strictly to the bare facts and makes no attempt to read any heroics into them. If any one is the hero, it is a town, quietly going about its normal work. The actors of that drama are also ordinary people; the poet has often met them in the evening; he has often exchanged polite meaningless words with them; sometimes he has made fun of them. They seemed so ordinary. In the poem, the first eighteen lines are employed to recalling these commonplace facts, and the poet is surprised that he was so mistaken about the possibilities latent in these, his fellow citizens. "A terrible beauty is born" and all is changed "utterly".

The next twenty-four lines are devoted to a sharp sketch of the chief actors. The first of these democratic spirits was a woman—the Countess Markiewicz, who was once a beauty but was now passing her time in 'ignorant good-will' and pleasant conversation. Seven lines, ending with her riding to harriers (or, hunting) are devoted to her. The next to be mentioned is the schoolmaster. Pearse, who gets two lines; then comes his friend, Connolly. Then comes the person whom the poet regarded as a "drunken, vainglorious lout," MacBride, Yeats's successful rival in love.

In the third round of sixteen lines, the poet sees in their action a fanaticism not quite desirable. In the living stream such one-track minds are like stones. This is a beautiful image. The men who act thus become callous like stone. Everything changes, but the stone does not. In the last twenty-eight lines, the poet asks if all their great sacrifice was necessary. After all, England may keep her promise to give Ireland freedom after the Great War. None-the-less, these people will be remembered in the future history of Ireland as heroes and martyrs.

The poem is also remarkable for an effect created by plain, unadorned, everyday speech : homely phrases like "polite meaningless words", "where motley is worn" (where people can be silly), "ignorant good-will", "the casual comedy" do the trick. There is nothing cheap or tawdry about the presentation, and that is why the tone of speech lingers in the reader's memory long after he has come across the poem.

According to Miss A. G. Stock, Yeats has left Constance Markiewicz unhonoured at the end of the poem, and his lines about her there are harsh :

> "That woman's days were spent
> In ignorant good-will,
> Her nights in argument
> Until her voice grew shrill."

"What impressed him was not the courage of her exploit but the ruin of a beauty that should have been sufficient to itself." Yeats failed to see heroism and honour in her because 'in his imagination she deputized for Maud Gonne ; and it was an enduring legacy from his love that woman's beauty and the politician's rant stood for the extremes of good and evil'.

The Imagery of the Poem

This poem is remarkable for the depth and intensity of symbols which have three characteristic features : "directness of expression illuminated by sudden, unexpected symbols, a tone of tragic solemnity, and thirdly, a processional quality." Image after image come in swift succession. In the first stanza, "the 'close of day' conveys the image of an evening sky, of a pale dusk and is, thus, linked to 'grey eighteenth century houses' ; the persons whom the poet describes are contemporary, but the impression persists that they belong to an ancient past and have come over again to play their part in the drama. But although they have come at close of day from grey eighteenth century houses, their faces are *vivid* and this antithesis suggests *transformation* which is the central theme of the poem. Then follows a stream of images telescoped into one another. Constance Markiewicz, Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Connolly and MacBride, they, as Yeats knew them once, were common men and women, but are now completely transformed through sacrifice and bloodshed.

"All changed, changed utterly :
A terrible beauty is born."

The whole poem is really focused on a single phrase—'terrible beauty.' According to Dr. B. Chatterjee, "In 'terrible' we have suggestion of terror, destruction and thrilling suspense, and 'beauty' is a contradictory image. But, when the two images are mixed up and reconciled, a new beauty is evoked, something like a red rose emerging out of a blood-saturated ground. To this central idea of transformation are related the two basic antithetical symbols, stream and stone. Apparently, 'stream' represents change and 'stone' stands for immobility and petrification, in other words, paralysis of the will……Hearts with 'one purpose' are likened to a stone placed in the midst of a 'living stream', but, at the same time, the stone is enchanting and hungry for souls ; in the final process, hearts are changed utterly : the petrified stone dissolves and a new beauty is born."

12

THE FALLING OF THE LEAVES

The Falling of the Leaves is one of Yeats's early poems. It was written in the pre-Rose phase of Yeats's career, and was included in the volume *The Crossways* published in 1889. The collection consists of short dramatic sketches, meditative and fanciful lyrics, ballads, songs and quatrains. 'The Song of Happy Shepherd', 'The Stolen Child', 'Down the Salley Gardens', and 'The Ballad of Moll Magee' are some of the finest pieces in this collection. Immature though the work is, latent in it are trains of thoughts and themes which will keep on recurring with widening significance up to the end of the poet's life.

It is the month of Autumn, and the leaves of rowan and the wild strawberry are yellow over the lovers whose souls are tired and weary. They will part with a kiss. The wanting of love is the theme of this poem.

Unterecker has elaborated on the point of its similarity with "Ephemera" which has delineated the same theme and also with 'Colloque Sentimental'. Unterecker writes :

"Drawing on identical theme, imagery, and language itself, 'Ephemera' (at one time subtitled 'An Autumn Idyll') explores precisely the same poetic materials Yeats had examined in 'The Falling of the Leaves', but in an entirely different way. 'The Waning of Love', the theme of 'The Falling of the Leaves' is the tired lover's subject at the beginning of 'Ephemera', but its development in terms of a brief dialogue reminiscent, as William York Tyndall has pointed out of Verlaine's 'Colloque Sentimental', gives it a kind of dramatic distance. The conversation of the lover is, if possible, even more sentimental than the language of 'The Falling of the Leaves', but 'Ephemera' made impersonal through characterization seems objective."—(*A Reader's Guide to Yeats*, p. 72).

The predominant tone in the poem is that of languor and weariness. It reflects the poet's decadent feelings. In his essay, *The Autumn of the Body* (1899), Yeats says that "man has wooed and won the world and has fallen weary", and that his weariness would not end till the autumn when the stars shall be blown away like withered leaves. His comment on the decadents is also significant : "I see, indeed, in the art of every country those faint lights and faint colours and faint outlines and faint energies which many call 'the decadence', and which I, because I believe that the arts lie dreaming of things to come, prefer to call the autumn of the body." Many of Yeats's early poems are redolent of this weariness. In these poems, the pursuit of the unknown, an endless quest after an object ever flying from desire is also visible. In *Ephemera* and *The Falling of the Leaves*, the sad, lonely, insatiable passion hidden in the human heart is seen fading like autumn's falling yellow leaves. The whole of the poem (*The Falling of the Leaves*) reads as follows :

"Autumn is over the long leaves that love us,
And over the mice in the barley sheaves :
Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,
And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves.
The hour of the waning of love has beset us,
And weary and worn are our sad souls now ;
Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,
With a kiss and tear on thy drooping brow."

13

THE FASCINATION OF WHAT'S DIFFICULT

A critic says, "Yeats completed his plays, specially those of Cuchulain cycle with a great difficulty. He was revising the last five at the time of his death. It was in fact, a task, which involved numerous poetic difficulties, but the fascination of intractable material, as he points out in his lyric, keeps the poet at his task.

"The poet feels that in his struggles to delineate the difficult, he has been deprived of the joy, the charm and the content of his heart. His pegasus, the creative genius suffers under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt and finds it difficult to carry his burden. He has to set up his plays in fifty ways to make them appear spontaneous and finds it embarrassing in his dealing with 'theatre business and management of men'.

"The poet has lost joy, the sap of his life, to make his art natural and effortless. The poems have to be composed with labour to make them look spontaneous."

Yeats's new mythology, though far more striking than the old, was to prove in many ways as abstruse and wayward. But, henceforth, ironic and often sharply rendered pictures of reality balanced the theoretical abstraction that had robbed his Rose poetry of any firm impact. Henceforth, there was always a hard edge to at least some of any poem's images. Henceforth, too, Yeats would express his moods, even those of exasperation, clearly, as in *The Fascination of What's Difficult*. in which he records his disgust with the practical job of suiting his reflective line to the simpler needs of the theatre :

"My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,
On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.
I swear before the dawn comes round again
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt."

The central theme of the poem is summarized in the following two lines :

"The fascination of what's difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins......"

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14

HE REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY

He Remembers Forgotten Beauty is one of Yeats's lyrics included in his volume entitled *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). Yeats's biographers have pointed out that between *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Wind Among the Reeds* he gave up the austere celibacy which love and idealism had imposed on him and tried to temper his hopeless passion for Maud Gonne by living with another woman Olivia Shakespeare, and that a few of the poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* were written of this second love. In one of his letters, Yeats, himself stated :

> "In my *Land of Heart's Desire* and in some of my lyric verse of that time, there is an exaggeration of sentiment and sentimental beauty which I have come to think unmanly. The popularity of *The Land of Heart's Desire* seems to me to come not from its merits but because of this weakness. I have been fighting the prevailing decadence for years and have just got it under foot in my own heart......it is sentiment and sentimental sadness, a womanish introspection......this region of shadows is full of false images of the spirit and of the body......I cannot probably be quite just to any poetry that speaks to me in the sweet insinuating feminine voice of the dwellers in that country of shadows and hollow images. I have dwelt there too long not to dread all that comes out of it."—(*Letters*, p. 434)

Moreover, in *The Wind Among the Reeds* he was not trying to master symbolism. As Prof. A. G. Stock says, "His symbolism became more intricate and elaborate. He was studying it for its own sake, learning it as one learns a language and makes it express increasing depth and subtlety of meaning." Several influences contribute to the characteristic quality of *The Wind Among the Reeds* : unrequited love in Yeats's personal life, the influence of symbolism on his literary mind, his deepening interest in esoteric wisdom, and his consequent conviction that the 'invisible gates' were about to open, that a 'crowning crisis of the world' was imminent which would renew belief in a supersensual reality. The result is a poetry of the twilight, solemn, ceremonious and remote, and yet at the same time intensely and evocatively personal, a poetry which represents the farthest advance of Yeats's movement in the direction of the dream.

He Remembers Forgotten Beauty offshoots from such a background. It is characterized by sensuality and sentimentality. Even the symbol of rose used for ethereal objects stands for 'physical' in the poems included in *The Wind Among the Reeds*. The lover (poet) says :

> "When my arms wrap you round I press
> My heart upon the loveliness
> That has long faded from the world ;
> The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled
> In shadowy pools, when armies fled ;
> The love-tales wrought with silken thread
> By dreamy ladies upon cloth
> That has made fat the murderous moth ;
> The roses that of old time were
> Woven by ladies in their hair,
> The dew-cold lilies ladies bore
> Through many a sacred corridor
> Where such grey clouds of incense rose
> That only God's eyes did not close :
> For that pale breast and lingering hand
> Come from a more dream-heavy land,
> A more dream-heavy hour than this......"

So the atmosphere is dreamy. The poet-lover is lost in sensual pleasure. Physical love or passion has its own power ; it is so powerful that the armies cannot crush it ; the crowns of the kings have been thrown into the shadowy pools for its sake. Love-tales have often been narrated and inscribed in various manners.

At last the moment comes when the poet hears his beloved sighing from kiss to kiss :

> "I hear white Beauty sighing, too,
> Four hours when all must fade like dew,
> But flame on flame, and deep on deep,
> Throne over throne where in half sleep,
> Their swords upon their iron knees,
> Brood her high lovely mysteries."

The impact which the poem still makes is not because of its ornate craftsmanship, but because of the corrective force of the personal element in it which humanizes the otherwise sedative mixture of the Celtic Twilight and the Golden Dawn. The symbolic structure, when it is working correctly, magnifies and generalizes the personal emotion.

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15

HIS DREAM

His Dream is one of the seven famous poems on love and Maud Gonne in *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910-1912), beginning with 'A Woman Homer Sung' and ending with 'Against Unworthy Praise'.

The basic tongue of these seven poems, says Peter Ure, is the language of a man's conversation with himself, sufficiently shaped and formalized by measure and rhyme to acquire the strength of final statement, as in these lines from 'Peace' :

> "Were not all her life but storm,
> Would not painters paint a form
> Of such noble lines, I said,
> Such a delicate high head,
> All that sternness amid charm,
> All that sweetness amid strength ?"

The immediate gesture of the speaker is ever present in these 'thoughts', and each poem is made living and continuous by the pursuit of the logic in feeling and thought : "Why should I blame her for making misery and violence about her ? What else could she have done ? Is she not a second Helen ?"—(*No Second Troy*) ; or "I was like the king in the play, prevented from loving by a word ; he found happiness at last but I, who am not a fictive being like him, know what I have lost in life and do not know that I shall recover it in heaven."—(*A King and No King*).

The Helen-association, chosen for Maud Gonne, emblematizes the double vision—each poem a centre where antitheses meet : a ruinous beauty, that exacts blame and praise. Other antitheses are living/writing—(*Words*), the peace of age/the storm of youth—(*Peace*), the shared private dream, the lonely public reality of scorn—(*Against Unworthy Praise*).

Perhaps the most beautiful of these poems is the first, *A Woman Homer Sung*, a poem without flaw. It is marked particularly by the third and fourth rhyming lines in each stanza, which quicken the peace, and enhance the stress and suspicion of the ensuing line :

> "And trod so sweetly proud
> As 'twere upon a cloud,
> A woman Homer sung......"

The Green Helmet is 'distinguished by a new note of political bitterness, mixed with personal passion. In this volume, Yeats was evolving a new poetic principle of blending satire with personal passion, and bidding good-bye to politics. The sentiments of love and hatred combine together in poems like *His Dream.*

The poem, *His Dream*, is founded on a dream, and giving its history of composition, Unterecker records Yeats having made the following statement :

> "A few days ago I dreamed that I was steering a very gay and elaborate ship upon narrow water with many people upon its banks, and that there was a figure upon a bed in the middle of the ship. The people were pointing to the figure and questioning, and in my dream I sang verses which fade as I awoke, all but this fragmentary thought, 'We call it, it has such dignity of limb, by the sweet name of death.' I have made my poem and my dream and the sentiments of my dream, and can almost say, as Blake did 'The Authors are in Eternity'."

As Unterecker further makes a mention that both love and death appear in the poem. There is a speaker on the ship of death and he sways upon the gaudy stern. To whatever direction he sees, he sees a crowd upon the shore. They run to the brim and talk of the sweet name of death. The speaker, an image of irrational man, is not inclined to speak, but he is compelled to praise.—(See Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to Yeats*).

According to Prof. A. G. Stock, "*His Dream* has the echo of the supernatural that filled all his earlier works, and this as it happens is a transcript of a sleeping dream, not a waking one. The rest of the book is more like a record of thoughts arising from the day's encounters. It carries out his newly discovered aim ; to ascend out of common life, but only so far as he can take with him 'the normal, passionate, reasoning self'.

"The most striking impression is that the book (*Green Helmet*) is essentially Maud Gonne's. Seven of the poems are for her, and it is here that she first shines on the page with a peculiarly living, individualized quality.

"Many poets have boasted that they will immortalize the beauty of a woman. Of most, all that we remember now is that there was beauty and that the poet was moved by it ; the women themselves are shadows. The darkness of Shakespeare's mistress, Stella's black eyes framed in golden hair, the roses of innumerable cheeks—what do they all amount to, and what difference would it make beyond the turn of a sonnet if the lady had been of a different colour ? A painter could have told us better. But if every painting of Maud Gonne vanished something of her would remain credible in Yeats's verses. He painted her as words can, dynamically, seeing her body as the projection of a quality of spirit which stirred him :

"With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern'."

Now that hope was gone he could assess the gain and the loss of loving her. It had lifted him irrevocably to the plane where life and legend meet :

> "For she had fiery blood
> When I was young,
> And trod so sweetly proud
> As 'twere upon a cloud,
> A woman Homer sung,
> That life and letters seem
> But an heroic dream." —*A Woman Homer Sung.*

But still she had gone out of his reach ; she had become a Catholic and accepted her own wrecked marriage as final. In *A King and No King* he wrote :

> "And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
> That in the blinding light beyond the grave
> We'll find so good a thing as we have lost ?
> The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,
> The habitual content of each with each
> When neither soul nor body has been crossed."

There is poignancy in the deliberate ordinariness of the words. When he was young he wrapped up common life in metaphor and prayed to :

> "......find under the bonds of love and hate,
> In all poor foolish things that live a day,
> Eternal beauty wandering on her way"

—with a touch of condescension that made the prayer unlikely to be answered. Now that common happiness was out of his reach he stopped condescending and described it clearly.

"Love and dream are not his only themes. In *The Green Helmet* he suddenly drops his aloofness and becomes a man of the world, a satirist and a thinker with clear-up, unpopular views. In two poems, *The Mark* and *Brown Penny*, he celebrates the discovery of casual love, a discovery which gathered significance in the poems of his old age. In two others, he is absorbed in theatre business, sardonically observing his own and other men's follies. He is growing famous, and his contempt for popular judgment makes him impatient of fame ; he turns his satire against himself and the public, and paints it with arrogance......As a whole they are prickly poems."

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16

JOHN KINSELLA'S LAMENT FOR MRS. MARY MOORE

John Kinsella's Lament For Mrs. Mary Moore is a ballad of three stanzas, each stanza contains twelve lines. It is the last verse in the volume, *Last Poems*. Yeats visited Edith Shackleton Heald whom he wrote from the Lady Dorothy Wellesley's estate : "I have just thought of a chorus for a ballad." "A strong farmer is mourning over the shortness of life and changing times, and every stanza ends 'What shall I do for pretty girls now my old bawd is dead'. I think it might do for a new *broad side*."—(Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to Yeats*, p. 284).

In this poem the poet says that there is a danger in the abstract passion which should be born out of reality. Yeats had expressed the idea that connection with reality should not be severed, rather we should grasp what we possess "so that the next civilization may be born not from a virgin's womb, nor a tomb without a body, but of our own rich experience." The poem is a farmer's lament on the transitory nature of life which is in a state of flux.

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

Noose—loop of rope (with a running knot) that becomes tighter when the rope is pulled. (फाँसी का फंदा) ।

Bawd—life partner ; obscene, humorous talker.

Interpretation and Paraphrase

John Kinsella is a farmer. He is also a mouthpiece of the poet. He laments for his old partner, Mrs. Mary Moore whom death has not spared. "Death can come in a moment. A gunshot or a noose can end one's life in a moment. Death would not spare any one ; my sisters and cousins would not be spared either. Death took away many a life. Yet it was not satisfied. It also took away my dear Mary Moore's life without whom the pretty girls which I have are sad ; what shall I do for them ?" (The world of old age is necessarily one of lesser satisfaction ; in it the death of an 'old bawd' can mean the loss of Eden, suggests Dr. B. Rajan).

"When Mary Moore was alive ; she was a wonderful talker and narrator. We talked and laughed together, and enjoyed life. We drank together many a can. She used to narrate stories, not of a religious nature, but of a sensual nature, the stories which kept the soul of man alive, free from the pangs of age and care. Although she was old, yet she could put the skin of liveliness (*experience*) to everything she narrated."

The priests have a book (the Bible) which speaks of Adam's Sin and the existence of Eden's Garden. Had Adam not committed a sin, the Bible tells us, man would have remained there. So John Kinsella says that he too would have remained there, and the life there would have been of hope and happiness, for no expectation fails there, no pleasing habit ends, no man grows old, no girl grows cold, where friendship does not get worn, where petty quarrels do not take place.

Thus, the poem is philosophical and delineates certain general truths. 'The paradise of the earlier poetry where the earth and the sky and the water were remade like a casket of gold has now withered to a more restricted ideal' :

"No expectation fails there,
  No pleasing habit ends,
No man grows old, no girl grows cold,
  But friends walk by friends.
Who quarrels over halfpennies
  That plucks the trees for bread ?"

17

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

Introduction

During 1887-1891, Yeats was in London where life was mechanical and artificial, when he was in his teens he had enjoyed natural life in Sligo (Ireland). Memories of the scenic beauty and attraction of Sligo still remained cherished in his heart. Hence, this poem like its sister-poems in the collection *The Rose* (1893), reveals the poet's desire to escape from the fear and fret of the miserable real life to a peaceful, tranquil and ideal place. The poet, like Thoreau, expresses a deep desire to seek peace and tranquillity. He would go to the Island of Innisfree and build a small cabin. He himself wrote in *Autobiographies* :

"I had still the ambition formed in Sligo in my teens of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden rememberance came my poem *Innisfree*, my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music. I had begun to loosen rhythm as an escape from rhetoric and from that emotion of the crowd that rhetoric brings, but I only understood vaguely and occasionally that I must for my special purpose use nothing but the common syntax. A couple of years later I would not have written that first line with its conventional archaism—'Arise and go'—nor the inversion in the last stanza."

Word-meanings, Notes and Paraphrase

Stanza 1

Innisfree—an island in Ireland. Some critics are of the opinion that the Lake Isle of Innisfree is the land of the heart's desire of the poet. None-the-less, it is not purely an imaginary or airy lake. Innisfree is an actual island in Lough Gill, Sligo.

Cabin—cottage.

Wattles—twigs.

Bean—a kind of vegetable.

Hive—habitation of bees ; a bee-hive.

Bee-loud—humming of bees.

Glade—an open place in the forest.

N.B.—The first line of the poem 'I will arise and go to Innisfree' echoes the *New Testament* ("I will arise and go unto my father").

The line is symptomatic of the traditional, almost religious 'stateliness' of this verse.

Paraphrase

The poet hates the modern world of fret and fear, of science and materialism, or logic and crookedness. He wants to escape to the heaven of peace and fulfilment. The Lake Isle of Innisfree is such a place. He wants to go there to live in peace and wisdom. There he will make, out of clay and reeds, a small cottage. He will grow a little garden there with nine bean rows planted there. [The epithet 'nine bean' denotes mystery and sacredness]. The place where the poet will live will be sacred, purified of all the impurities of the world. The atmosphere of that place will be mysterious because there the air will be filled with the idea of images and angels. He will keep some bees who will supply him with honey. The passionate yearning for the glade fills the void and completes the picture.

Stanza 2

Dropping slow—peace coming down slowly.

Dropping—falling.

Veils of morning—mist.

Cricket—a small chirping insect.

Sings—chirps.

All aglimmer—full of gleams.

Purple glow—glowing, blazing light.

Linnet's wings—flutter of linnet wings.

Linnet—a singing bird.

Paraphrase

In such a heaven of his dreams the poet shall have peace. There is no peace in this world torn by tension and trouble, sound and fury, conflicts and struggles, disappointments and frustrations, slavery and suffering. There in Innisfree, he shall have peace and rest, for in Innisfree peace prevails and descends down from the veils of the morning. The cricket and the linnet will keep him company, and he will be living in perfect peace. There the midnight will be all glimmer and noon will be perpetually growing. And in the evening the sweet bird will sing melodiously.

Stanza 3

Lapping—washing.

With low sounds—the music produced by the lake water.

Pavements gray—the gray pavements of London. It is the call of Innisfree.

Deep heart's core—in the depth of my heart.

N.B.—'Innisfree' symbolizes a Utopia, a country of the mind, where one can live in peace, away from the fear and fret of the world.

Paraphrase

So the poet cannot stay in the city any longer. He will soon arise and go to Innisfree. For all the time in a dreamy manner he goes on hearing lake water striking at the shore and producing murmuring sweet music made by the waves of the lake. Whether he is on the footpath of the busiest road or on the grey pavements of London streets, he always hears the call of Innisfree.

Explanation

"*I will arise..................deep heart's core.*"

(Stanza 3, Lines 9-12).

These lines form a part of William Butler Yeats's poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", which appeared in the collection entitled *The Rose* (1893).

When the poet composed this poem, he was in London. He disliked the busy and artificial life of London, when compared to the natural life he had lived at Sligo (Ireland) during his teens. Sligo was a beautiful place famous for its scenic beauty and landscape charm. So he wanted to escape from London to Innisfree, in other words, he wanted to escape from the real world to an ideal, dreamy, airy world which would be peaceful and tranquil.

The poet says that even while on the busiest roads of London and the dusty streets of London, he has been dreaming for an early escape from this world to that of the lake island of Innisfree, and have been hearing the music made by the striking waves of the lake. The memory of Innisfree his always been within his heart. So he wishes to arise soon and go to Innisfree where he would build a cottage of clay and reeds, and rest and resort peacefully and pleasantly.

N.B.—(1) The last line—"I hear it in the deep heart's core" has a haunting melody.

(2) The stanza suggests the usual dreaminess and craving for an escape from the real world.

(3) The influence of the Pre-Raphaelites is quite apparent.

(4) This is poetry for the sake of poetry.

(5) The stanza also reflects the requisite lyrical qualities of Yeats's genius.

A Critical Appreciation of the Poem

The poem, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, was published in the volume *The Rose* (1893). When Yeats wrote this poem, he was staying in London. He did not like London ; he craved for a life he had once lived in childhood at his grand maternal parents' at Sligo. It was a period of his life when he had begun to develop a love for solitude and a bias for reverie, for mountaincaves and dreaming. Sligo was a land full of beautiful natural scenery. London was much different from it. Yeats writes in his *Autobiographies* :

"A poignant memory came upon me the other day while I was passing the drinking-fountain near Hall and Park, for

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> there I and my sister had spoken together of our longing for Sligo and our hatred for London. I knew we were both very close to tears and remember with wonder,—that I longed for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hands."

As the poet tells us in his *Autobiographies* that even in 1890 when the poem was composed he had still the ambition formed in Sligo in his teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick he heard "a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem *Innisfree*. my first lyric with everything in its rhythm of my own music. I had begun to loosen rhythm as an escape from rhetoric and from that emotion of the crowd that rhetoric brings, but I only understood vaguely and occasionally that I must for my special purpose use nothing but the common syntax."

Thus, the poet's Thoreau-like dream of living a solitary life on an Island in Lough Gill (Sligo) has been immortalized in this poem.

The poem can be called tranquillity recollected in emotion. Unterecke has said about this poem, "The three poems that follow the trio of 'roses' focus exclusively on the lucky state of the pure in heart who are wrapped in the illusions of 'The Rose of Peace'. 'A Faery Song' offers 'rest' to the legendary Irish lovers who fled from Conchubor's wrath ; *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* beckons Yeats with its promise of some peace away from London's grey pavements ; and 'A Cradle Song'—partly translated from a Gaelic poem—sighs that innocent children must grow up." Yeats expresses a deep desire to seek peace and tranquillity. He would go to the Island of Innisfree, build a hut of clay and reeds, enjoy the charms and beauties of nature—the music of waves, the songs of linnet and cricket, the night's glimmer, the moon's glow, and so on so forth :

"I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made :
Ninebean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade."

Furthermore the poet himself states the reason :

"And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the
cricket sings ;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings."

There peace descends with the morning mist and noon ; evening and midnight are all very pleasant. Day and night he hears the musical sound of the lake water and would soon go there. Even when he stands on the road he hears its irresistible call.

The poem is remarkable for the purity of heart and the autobiographical essence. But the tone of the poem is little more than sentimental, and lacks the sense of suffering and purification through agony and fire that is dominant in the Byzantium poems. That is why Yeats himself did not like the poem in his later years. Dorothy Wellesley tells us that the poet in his old age grew to hate all his early poems—*Innisfree* in particular. Once when pressed to recite it, "a look of tortured irritation came upon his face and continued there until the reading was over." In his *Autobiographies* too he wrote : "A couple of years later I would not have written that first line with its conventional archaism—'Arise and go'—nor the inversion in the last stanza."

The Lake Isle of Innisfree has not yet been discovered. According to J. H. Fowler, "His lake island is doubtless somewhere in Ireland, but he has distinguished its name, "lest inquisitive tourists hunt it and make a lien and get it at last into guide-books." Nonetheless, Yeats's utopia is not airy. As A. C. Ward has observed, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* effects a compromise between concrete picturing and dreamlike imagining. The cabin of clay and wattle ; the nine bean rows and the honeybee ; evening full of the linnet's wings ; the lapping of lake water—these are the actualities recalled by the exile......the infusion of personal feeling is powerful enough to make the image more substantial than a vague dream."

In a letter from far-off Samoa, R. L. Stevenson wrote that he was laid under a spell by Innisfree—'It is so quaint and airy, simple, artful and eloquent to the heart.' Many other readers have the same opinion about the poem. But there are some other critics who have disliked it. Robert Graves made fun of it. Stephen Spender denounced it as a poem 'which calls up the image of a young man reclining on a yellow satin sofa'. Spender's attempt to group Yeats with the decadent aesthetes of the 'nineties is responsible for such unfavourable judgment. But this is the criticism mainly of the mood of the poem, not an actual denunciation. Moreover, Stephen Spender's criticism seems to be of a negative kind. For a sympathetic critic the poem calls up different images, 'a dreamy wistful youth standing on the macadam pavement of a city street, immersed in reverie, and a small hut in certain wood-bordered is let with its nine bean rows and its perpetual glimmer and glow : the boy's passionate yearning for the glade fills the void between the two and completes the 'picture'. The words and epithets evoke the poetic passion in the reader's heart. "The long vowel sounds and the haunting music of the lines reinforced by the humming of the bees, the rustle of the linnet's wings and the murmur of the lake water produce the spell of an enchanted atmosphere and the reader feels that the poem means more than it says, that it speaks not simply of a youth's longing for a distant island but also of the unbridgeable gulf between the real, world and the world of imagination." The line 'And I shall have some peace there suggests the poet's keen sensitiveness to the inadequacies of reality, its conflicts and machinations.

"The studiously careful rhythmical structure is equally effective. Yeats freed himself from the metrical regularity he had previously observed, and gave attention mainly to securing a rhythmical basis which should allow scope for natural speech stress, and also for the general maintenance of natural word-order. Some use is made of repetition, but little of inversion. There is no rigid syllabic structure, the number of syllables to the lines ranging from eight to fifteen."

The accented vowels vary greatly in the amount of time that they force the tongue to linger over them :

> "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree
> Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee."

"The emotional effect of the poem is also heightened but the subtle interaction of vowel-music and consonant-vowels combining a preponderance of open vowels (sometimes further lengthened by the governing rhythms) with a judicious use of alliteration and sibilants, to suggest the bees and linnets, crickets and lapping water. This might seem, at first to be no more than the familiar device of onomatopoeia, but that device forms only the stern upon which a variety of other devices is grafted."

Prosodically, the poem is a throw-back to Anglo-Saxon poetry ; semantically, it is the expression of an archetypal desire. The poem has a duality of impression. It is a patriotic poem and also an escape poem. The emotional tone of the poem is heightened by simple manner. The picturesque words and the lingering rhythm combine together to convey a dream-laden ecstasy, the Irish background giving it some contact with reality.

"The widespread appeal of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* does not depend wholly upon response to the sentiment of the words. The studiously careful rhythmical structure is equally effective. Yeats freed himself from the metrical regularity he had previously observed, and gave attention mainly to securing a rhythmical basis which should allow scope for natural speech stress, and also for the general maintenance of natural word order. Some use is made of repetition, but little of inversion. There is no rigid syllabic structure, the number of syllables in a line ranging from eight to fifteen. The emotional effect of the poem is also heightened by the subtle interaction of vowel-music and consonant-vowels, combining a preponderance of open vowels (sometimes further lengthened by the governing rhythm) with a judicious use of alliteration and sibilants to suggest the bees and linnets, crickets and lapping water. This might seem, at first, to be no more than the familiar device of onomatopoeia, but that device forms only the stern upon which a variety of other devices is grafted. Few modern poems can have had so much artistry lavished upon them as *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*;

but this and much of his work of that period was imbued with the romanticism which Yeats distrusted more and more as he aged. In a remarkable and unusual way he moved with the current of the times, and though—as his editorial preface to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1937) shows—he was capricious in his views on poetry, he had both sympathy and understanding for the younger generation of poets whose deeds were so different from those of his own youth. Recurrently in the poems of his last years the continuing vigour of his mind and senses is in revolt against the enfeeblement of his body : 'lust and rage' were with him still to spur him into songs. His progress as a lyrical poet can be gauged from a comparison of the *Innisfree Poem* (1893) with the more complex *Byzantium Poem* (1930), the first having a plastic loveliness, the other a beauty that is not less but only less malleable in its suggestion. It was particularly, the harder quality of beauty in Yeats's poems during his last phase that aligned him with the poets of the new age."—(A. C. Ford).

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18

LAPIS LAZULI[1]

Introduction

Written on 25th July, 1936, the poem was published in *Last Poems* (1936-1939). It is the second poem of the volume; the first is *The Gyres*. The poem was written shortly after Yeats received a gift of a large piece of lapis lazuli (a precious stone) 'carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths, and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain.' He evidently began at once to think about its significance, and wrote to Dorothy Wellesley: "Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual East, the heroic cry in the midst of despair; but no, I am wrong, the East has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the East, that must raise the heroic cry." It was in this lyric, therefore, that Yeats came to grip with the problem that makes our time so restless, the destruction of civilization which may be impending. "Only one poem, *Lapis Lazuli*, confronts Asia and Europe without representing them at odds with one another."

This poem delineates two themes. First, the old civilizations have been wiped out and the modern civilization is likely to be annihilated. The allusion to 'aeroplanes and zeppelins', and the destruction of cities is one contemporary theme. The next theme depicts the triumph of art and philosophy over the 'tragedy' of the modern event.

Word-meanings, Annotations, Paraphrase, etc.

Stanza 1

Palette—the plate or board on which a painter puts and mixes his colours.

Fiddle-bow—music.

Zeppelin—a cigar-shaped aeroplane of the type designed by Count Zeppelin.

Pitch—drop.

King Billy—King of Orange who hurled bombs in the battle of Boyne.

Bomb-balls—incendiary bombs first used during World War I. A bomb is a hollow iron ball filled with explosive and exploded by a fuse or by the force of the impact when it is dropped or thrown or fired.

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[1] **Pronounced as** "लेपिस लेजूलाई" ।

Paraphrase

The poet refers to the war-hysteria which possessed all Europe in the thirties. The memories of the First World War and its ravages were still fresh and the people were terrified at the mere thought of a Second World War. Yet war preparations were on and the air was charged with suspense and anxiety. Nervous, terrified people, like hysterical women, were disgusted with the fine arts, as painting, music and poetry. The Arts could be of no good to them. They could not save them from the impending horror. The gaiety of the artist offended them, for it struck a jarring note in that time of crisis. Drastic and urgent measures were needed to prevent the outbreak of the war. If immediate steps were not taken, bombardment from the air would destroy their towns and cities, and make life impossible.

N. B.—(1) The opening stanza focuses on the hysterical women and on modern times. Yeats is thinking of women whom he knew before 1916, who grew too narrowly devoted to political cause and underrated the arts (the palette and fiddle-bow) and also of women in the 1930's who wanted to devote all their energies to resisting Hitler and other Fascists. Those women rejected music, painting and poetry in favour of politics. Yeats had in his mind Maud Gonne and Constance Markiewicz who lost their beauty and their voices in street-corner oratory. In *A Prayer for my Daughter*, the poet said that he had seen—

"The loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
For an old bellows full of angry wind."

These women believe in action rather than in contemplation. They want that something drastic must be done otherwise the war will break out. The poet dispels the fear of war. The lines now focus on modern times, war-tossed modern times are as bad as those of 1690 when King Billy of Orange pitched in bomb-ball at the Battle of Boyne—and which found a modern counterpart in another King Billy, Kaiser Wilhelm II, whose zeppelins and aeroplanes had harried the English in the First World War. Thus "stanza first lists the three areas of art which doomed to destruction, nevertheless go down to destruction gaily."—(Adapted from Unterecker).

(2) D. S. Savage thinks that the description of modern war is not satisfactory. Modern war is hardly presented adequately to the imagination in his otherwise admirable poem *Lapis Lazuli.*

Stanza 2

Do not break......weep—continue to play their role up to the end. They do not break down weeping at the prospect of death.

Gaiety......dread—the very zest which an actor has for his performance converts even tragedy into gaiety. The aesthetic pleasure which an artist derives from the pursuit of his art makes him gay; even his subject is tragic in essence.

All men have......lost—human life is basically tragic, it has always been so down the years and in every country.

Black out......head—there is a confrontation of opposites here. The acceptance of the external horrors of the human scene leads to inner illumination. Profound philosophy emanates from an understanding of life's tragic reality.

It cannot......an ounce—human lot has always been wholly and excessively tragic, and hence, a mere multiplication of horrors cannot add to the tragedy any further.

Paraphrase

The poet commends the study of the fine arts to a generation oppressed by war-hysteria. The arts are not useless; it is the art alone which can enable us to face the tragic reality bravely and heroically. We are all actors in a tragic drama, and we must play our parts bravely, and continue to act undisturbed unto the last. A great tragic actor, who may be acting the tragic role of Ophelia, or Cordelia, or of Lear or Hamlet, continues to act his part up to the very end when the final catastrophe takes place and the curtain drops. He never breaks down into tears, not even in the horrible last scene, which depicts the death of the tragic hero and heroine. As a matter of fact, for a really great actor the very zest of acting brings its own pleasure, even though his role is one of dire tragedy. His joy in his art and the aesthetic pleasure which it brings him transforms horror itself into gaiety. Moreover, human life has always been tragic; man has always suffered, found and lost. Utter darkness, the darkness of tragedy and misfortune, has surrounded him in all ages, but this very terror of reality has been the source of wisdom and profound philosophy. Inner illumination comes out of terror and real life begins only when its tragedy is recognized and accepted. Art has always represented the tragedy of human life, and a study of art, therefore, is conducive to an understanding of life's reality. The uttermost tragedy has been a great advance in the techniques of horror. Hamlet and Lear enact their tragic roles all over the modern world. Today, the tragedy is world-wide, and the drop curtain is likely to drop all at once "upon a hundred thousand stages", *i. e.*, the entire humanity is likely to be engulfed in a world-wide conflagration. But this intensification and multiplication of horror does in no way lessen the validity and significance of the artist's understanding of the human predicament, and his expression of it in his art. At all times, great artists have realized in their respective arts the extremes of tragedy and suffering, and hence, arts are valid even to-day when the zero hour seems to be so close.

N. B.—(1) 'The second stanza describes the way in which the artist's characters have met tragedy and death.' The tragic characters play their tragic role of life heroically. Hamlet, the hero of Shakespeare's ***Hamlet*****, Lear, the hero of** ***King Lear*****, Ophelia, the heroine of**

Hamlet, and Cordelia, the heroine in *King Lear*—all of them have met tragedy and death. They are all about to die, but they are still gay. They are great and exultant in the face of death. And as the last scene is there (in the last scene of the Shakespearean tragedy, most of the important characters die), and the curtain is to drop, the heroes and heroines of Shakespeare do not weep amidst their dialogues like the hysterical women. They are brave and, therefore, gay in their death. "Tragedy is wrought to its uttermost in their gaiety as they find and lose all that men have aimed at ; for us both scenes and heroes literally 'Blackout'."

(2) Explaining these lines Ellmann observes that Shakespeare's tragic heroes act upon an old theory of his ; they play the tragic parts they have decided upon, and the moment of their actual death is the moment of their triumph, for death fuses them to their chosen image of themselves.

Stanza 3

Went to rack—decayed and fell to pieces.

Callimachus—a profound scholar, critic and sculptor of Athens of the Hellenistic period.

Draperies—the representation of the clothing or dress of human figures in sculpture and painting.

His long lamp-chimney.....palm—a fine description of the beauty and delicacy of a piece of sculpture representing a lamp-chimney, as delicate and fine as the long, thin stem of a palmleaf.

Paraphrase

In this stanza, the poet says that so many civilizations in the world have fallen, and are heard of no more. We should not feel sorry if our own civilization is also destroyed. In the first two lines, the poet says that in early days the armies had to move on their own feet, on shipboard, camel-back, ass-back and even mule-back. They came with their swords brandishing, and destroyed men, buildings, and everything that we call civilization. The armies were slaughtered as their wisdom went a wool-gathering. The artist who contributes most to each civilization will be as defeated as everyone else ; but like his characters he will be gay in his defeat. Callimachus, the Athenian sculptor, made many wonderful things. He handled marble as if it were bronze. Yet no handiwork of such a great, famous sculptor exists now. He invented the running drill that afterwards was regularly used to stimulate the folds of drapery in marble and he had made the Ereetheum's bronze lamp shaped like a palm. But he was so thoroughly defeated and extinguished that nothing of him now exists. His long lamp-chimney stood for a short period. Yet individual defeat is not very important to the artist, because he is man's necessary builder. Though he knows that all things "are built again". The mind has another glory, besides its power to destroy, it can create also. So all those that build again, can be happy again.

N. B.—As the wheel of history moves on, civilizations are born, mature and decay, and new civilizations are born out of the ruins of the old ones. This cyclic process of history is described through the use of highly pictorial and vivid images. The invading hoards arrive on ships, camels, horses, asses and mules and destroy old civilizations. The invaders and their wisdom, too, are destroyed in course of time. No phase of human civilization lives for ever. Even such perfect works of art as those of Callimachus are short-lived and transient. Destruction and construction (or, reconstruction) are the eternal laws of nature. The artist knows that what he creates is ephemeral, but the very act of creation, his enthusiasm for his art, ever keeps the artist gay and cheerful.

Stanza 4

Lapis lazuli—it is a semi-precious blue stone carved in the way, Yeats describes in lines 37-56.

Paraphrase

Having given an account of the war-hysteria and panic that swept contemporary Europe, the poet turns to the lapis lazuli in his possession. This Chinese piece of carved stone shows three human figures. Two of them are Chinamen—an ascetic and his disciple—and the third one who follows them carries a musical instrument. This shows that he is their servant. Over the three, flies a long-legged bird—an auspicious bird whose presence overhead indicates that the three figures would enjoy a long life.

Stanza 5

Paraphrase

Continuing with the description of the delicate carvings on the lapis lazuli, the poet notices a mountain slope on which various discolourations of the stone and accidental cracks represent flowing streams of waterfalls or snowfall. Halfway up the slope there is a rest-house surrounded by plum trees and cherry bushes. Its setting is sweet and pleasant. The Chinamen climb towards this pleasant rest-house and the poet imagines them comfortably seated there. From their point of vantage high on the mountain they survey the tragic scene around. One of them desires that some sweet mournful song be sung, and the skilful artist who carries the musical instrument begins to play. The eyes of the two Chinese listeners shine brightly in their wrinkled faces, and they are gay, despite the tragic scene around them. Thus, art can keep people happy even in the midst of dire tragedy.

N. B.—In this stanza, the poet changes the perspective. We are no longer staring at a high-lighted stage, but stand on a lofty mountain overlooking the world and the ages. From here the rise and fall of civilizations is no matter for pathos or female hysteria, but seems a necessary part of the scene. John Unterecker has compared this stanza with *Ode on a Grecian Urn* of Keats. He says that the final stanza expounds the fourth in very much the same way as Keats expands the little town in *Ode on a Grecian Urn.*

A Critical Appreciation of the Poem 'Lapis Lazuli'

Written on 25th July, 1936, the Poem was published in *Last Poems* (1936-1939). "...only one poem, *Lapis Lazuli*, confronts Asia and Europe without representing them at odds with one another. This poem was written shortly after Yeats received a gift of a large piece of lapis lazuli carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths, and an ascetic and a pupil about to climb the mountain. He evidently began at once to think about its significance, and wrote to Dorothy Wellesley : "Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual East has its solutions always and, therefore, knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the East, that must raise the heroic cry." In the resulting lyric, Yeats came to grip with the problem that makes our time so restless, the destruction of civilization which may be impending. In these circumstances have the poets the right to be gay ? Yeats proceeds to justify gaiety first in terms of the West and then of the East. The West is represented by the heroes of its tragedies :

> "All perform their tragic play,
>
> × × ×
>
> It cannot grow by an inch or ounce."

This stanza is usually explained by references to prose passages in which Yeats maintains that 'the arts are all the bridal chambers of joy', but these too require explanations His tragic heroes act upon an old theory of his ; they play the tragic parts they have decided upon, and the moment of their actual death is the moment of their stage triumph, for death fuses them to their chosen image of themselves. This is what they have aimed at and found, and in finding lost. This completion of their image is the moment of supreme joy, for at this moment, like the Norse god hung over an abyss as a sacrifice to himself, they simultaneously surrender and realize themselves, transcend their temporary being by becoming their timeless image, become immortal and die.

"Now the poet turns to defend gaiety Asiatically. Seeing through the eyes of the three Chinese on the stone, he changes the perspective : we are no longer staring at a high-lighted stage, but stand on a lofty mountain overlooking the world and the ages. From here the rise and fall of civilizations is no matter for pathos or female hysteria, but seems a necessary part of the scene. The three Chinese, like Nietzsche, find joy in eternal recurrence, a gaiety which rises stubbornly in the midst of full knowledge of sorrow :

> 'Every discoloration of the stone,
>
> × × ×
>
> Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.'

"Under the tremendous pressure of the poet's mood, the lapis lazuli is made to yield the message of affirmation which he must have."—(Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, pp. 185-86).

"The poem, thus, begins with an account of the war-phobia and panic that swept across Europe during the years 1934-1939. It was a time of deepening frustration and the foreknowledge that war, more destructive than the first one, was in the offing. The circle of terror and violence was widening, and people were waiting for air-raids and incendiary bombs with horror in their hearts. They were nervous and hysterical, like women. It was generally felt that the fine arts like poetry, painting and music are of no good in such tragic times. The gaiety of poets and artists, jarred upon their nerves and seemed to be out of place in the tragic times in which they lived. What they needed was not art, but some drastic steps to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War. So the poet is impatient. "The aggressive crudity of the verse in the first stanza expresses his impatience." —(Stock).

After painting the terrifying and terror-stricken picture of the period, the poet goes on to add that the world is a tragic drama, and great actors like those of the tragedies of Shakespeare should play their part in it unto the last. There should be no weeping, no panic, no hysteric outbursts, but perfect self-control. It is the zest of an actor in his art that makes him gay even when playing a tragic role. So is the case with man. The zest for life should overcome the sorrows of life.

Birth-death-rebirth, destruction and re-construction is the eternal law of nature. Civilizations have decayed and died because of invasions and invaders. Even glorious works of art have perished. Nothing has escaped from the destructive rage of time. But there is no need to despair. The process of history is a cyclic one, there will be reconstruction after destruction :

> "All things fall and are built again,
> And those that build them again are gay."

Then the poet gives an account of the lapis lazuli. The piece shows two Chinamen going ahead followed by a third, a servant, with a musical instrument. Accidental cracks and discolouration on the stone look like a stream or an avalanche. There is a lofty hill on which halfway up is a rest-house. It is surrounded by plum or cherry trees which give a pleasant look. The Chinamen climb to the rest-house, and seated comfortably they survey the tragic scene around them. The servant plays a mournful tune, and their glittering eyes are gay. In moments of tragedy in life, it is art that revives our hope and enthusiasm for life.

Lapis Lazuli delineates two themes : (1) birth-death-rebirth, construction-destruction-reconstruction is a law of nature. Old civilizations have been destroyed, so will the modern civilization be,

(2) The next theme depicts the triumph of art and philosophy over tragedy and gloom of life.

Lapis Lazuli, a more fully controlled poem than *The Gyres*, is also closer to Yeats's demand for 'an act of faith and reason to make us rejoice in the midst of tragedy.' The difference between 'tragic joy' and 'gaiety transfiguring all that dread' is the difference between the apocalyptic and the aesthetic ; and disengagement is effected in art not by withdrawal but by recognition.

"I notice that you must have Lapis Lazuli," Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley. Someone, he added, "has sent me a present of a great piece carved by some Chinese sculptor into a semblance of a mountain, with temple, trees, paths and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain—ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual East. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong, the East has its solutions always and, therefore, knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the East, that must raise the heroic cry." These remarks are interesting, not because of their view of 'eastern' philosophy, but because of the implication that asceticism is the 'theme' of sensuality and also because of the recognition that the tragic sense can offer no 'solution, but rather highly coloured outline of this response, but the poem, because it is a poem, moves wisely away from the element of hysteria in the phrase. The offhand language of the opinion is meant to distance and discipline the panic at the edge of the abyss. Profound philosophy must come from terror, and life begins only when it is recognized as tragedy ; the confrontation that gives art its validity can only be endured when it is aesthetically controlled :

> "Black out : Heaven blazing into the head :
> Tragedy wrought to its uttermost."

The storm of reality is taken into the repose of art and the word 'wrought' is exact in suggesting the achieved balance of intensity and finesse. The consequences of 'uttermost' should also be noted. The point is that the dimensions of man's fate have already been compassed by art ; the understanding which includes them cannot be rendered obsolete by further progress in techniques of terror. Today we have more efficient methods of destruction than aeroplanes or zeppelins or the 'bomb-balls' employed at the battle of Boyne ; but the response of the poet and the depth of his recognition remain unalterably valid even under the sign of the mushroom.

> "Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
> And all the drop-scenes drop at once
> Upon a hundred thousand stages,
> It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce."

As the theatre opens into the theatre of history, one is conscious of the difference in tone from *The Gyres*. The irrational streams of blood which dominated the first poem are significantly absent and line, such as, 'Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back' has a quality both pictorial and remote. The repetitions suggest a procession or a pilgrimage as well as history's critical re-enactments. Callimachus's art is described in terms which may, as Wilson suggests, be influenced by Furwangler's *History of Art*, but the poetic purpose of the description is to blend the sense of beauty with that of evanescence in a thythm which both absorbs and counteracts the latent tragedy of the recognition. The effect is wholly different from that of *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* with its superficially similar recollection of "Phidias' famous ivories". Thus, the poem moves steadily away from the stance adopted in *The Gyres*, from an exultation in the destructive element to an aesthetic poise of the destructive and creative :

"All things fall and are built again,
And those that build them again are gay."

As the poem withdraws into the work of art, the processional effect is made to surround it so that history and change become the panorama interpreted by its point of view. Nothing is left out of the symbolic absorption and everything absorbed is given significance :

"Every discoloration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent,
Seems a water-course or an avalanche."

Words such as 'plum', 'cherry-branch', 'sweetness' and 'delight' create the sense of a disengagement, both stylized and traditional in its serenity. Tragedy does not cease to be tragedy ; but it is seen differently from the hill of the Muses :

"One asks for mournful melodies,
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay."

The stock of disaster is softened by 'mournful', and 'accomplished fingers' suggest not odly technical powers but the tragic experience soothed into artistic order. The zest of performance, creates a certain gaiety, irrespective of the theme that is performed : but eventually one discovers that the theme itself is gaiety. The repetition of 'eyes' emphasizes the changelessness of vision in the wrinkled face which itself becomes the mask of an ancient wisdom ; and 'glittering' suggests both the inner life of art and the manner in which artistic vision animates and gives significance to context The result is not gaiety alone but gaiety in balance with tragic recognition—the sense of life asserting itself in complete confrontation of all that seems to make meaningless.—(B. Rajan)

''In *Lapis Lazuli*, a piece of Chinese carved stone sets his thought moving. Here is art, like Rocky Face aware of human suffering and still rejoicing, and all around him are people so panic-stricken because their world is ending that art says nothing to them. The aggressive crudity of the verse in the first eight lines expresses his impatience :

> "I have heard that hysterical woman say
> They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow.
> Of poets that are always gay,
> For everybody knows or else should know
> That if nothing drastic is done
> Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,
> Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
> Until the town lie beaten flat."

The world is a tragic drama and great actors, if it is their luck to be in the last scene, play it through without breaking down :

> 'They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay ;
> Gaiety transfiguring all the dread.'

......he recalls the memory of civilizations destroyed, and how the world's life has nevertheless gone on. Then abruptly he switches over to the bit of lapis lazuli so delicately carved. There are two old men and a third with a musical instrument, climbing towards some little mountain rest-house......"—(A. G. Stock).

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19

LEDA AND THE SWAN

An Introduction to the Poem

The sonnet, *Leda and the Swan* was composed in 1923, and is one of the most perfect poems ever written by William Butler Yeats. It was included in the volume, *The Tower*. The artistic perfection, as Ellmann points out, was achieved not spontaneously but through at least six stages of revision and modification. It is the final fusion of history, myth and vision. Its force and richness arise from the fact that the poet has succeeded in it in enclosing "vast immensities" within a little compass.

The sonnet is a picturesque and dramatic presentation of the story of *Leda and the Swan* taken from the Greek mythology. According to the Greek story, Leda was the mother of mankind. Zeus or Jupiter appeared to her in the form of a swan, and made love to her. Out of this copulation of the human and the superhuman, of God and woman, were born great heroes and heroines who created the Athenian civilization and whose exploits have been narrated in the great Homeric epics Thus, Leda became the mother of Helen, Castor and Pollux, and Clytemnestra The copulation of Jupiter and Leda, in other words, set in motion a train of events which resulted in the destructive Trojan War, and the various events narrated in the great Aeschylian tragedies.

This myth had held his mind since his first use of it in *The Adoration of the Magi* in 1896, where he had prophesied that 'another Leda would open her knees to the swan' and begin a new age. The poem is based on the system of the historical gyre in his *A Vision* and should be read along with *The Second Coming*. The poem is symbolist in the sense that 'the manifest level is there to suggest unstated themes.' It expresses savagery and brutishness and is influenced by Synge. In this respect it can be related with *The Second Coming* which gives expression to 'the growing murderousness of the world'. The poem expresses the sensual immediacy and sexual shudder in the most savage way. It is a prophetic poem and can be read on mayy levels. The poem, though influenced by the painting of Michelangelo and the paintings in the British Museum, gives expression to the poet's own experiences and thoughts, and is original in its design and conception. The poet centres his attention not on the Swan, the god Zeus, but on Leda. He concentrates on the emotion of the women in the crisis. His main problem is to know whether 'did she put on his knowledge with his power,' whether power and knowledge can ever co-exist.

Word-meanings, Annotations and Paraphrase, etc.

Staggering blow—reeling with fright.

A sudden blow—these are the opening words of the poem ; they come suddenly in a dramatic way to shock us with their savagery. They speak as if the savage act, the rape, has been committed in the most naked and brute way. The swan with his wings beating swoops over the 'staggering girl and holds her. He catches her nape in his beak, caresses (kisses) her thighs. Then he holds her helpless breast upon his breast.' He embraces her and lies on her to start the savage act. To embrace this monstrous act strains all imagination. All contemplation is staggered.

Caressed—fondled.

Web—the blade of a feather in birds; the skin between the toes of water-fowls.

Nape—the back side of the neck.

Vague fingers—fingers entangled in the feathers of the swan.

Loosening thighs—the thighs slump after the process of love-making is over.

White rush—the lusty act of white swan.

How can those......where it lies—These four lines reveal that the woman Leda is so overcome by fear as to be unable to push the bird away. Her fingers are vague or immobile because they are buried in the bird's feathers or blurred from beating emotionally. Again they are vague because thighs already loosen to the feathered glory. The thighs loosen when the final act of love is over. Leda has been robbed of her virginity. She can now but feel the heart of the bird beating up against her own. 'In the act of the congress the loosening thighs and the white rush are antithetical aspects.' The softness of the thighs and the whiteness of the swan suggest how very sensual the contact was. Leda lay prostrate under the sexual frenzy of swan.

Shudder in the loins—the loins experience a throbbing sensation when the sexual act reaches orgasm. Leda has conceived.

Engenders—sows the seed of what Leda has conceived as a result of sexual copulation. In Leda's conception were sown the seeds of future.

The broken wall......tower—the allusion here is to the long drawn out Trojan War the cause of which was Helen, the daughter of Leda who was forced by god Zeus into sexual intercourse with him. According to Greek legend, Helen was the most beautiful woman of her age. She selected Menelaus, King of Sparta, for her husband, and was subsequently seduced by Paris, son of Priam, King of Troy, and carried off to Troy. Menelaus assembled the Greek princes who had been her suitors, and these resolved to make war on Troy for her recovery. As a result of this invasion the rampart wall of the town was pierced and the invaders poured into the city, burned its tower and houses and recovered Helen who was reconciled at last to her legitimate husband Menelaus.

Agamemnon dead—Agamemnon was the King of Argos and the son or grandson of Atreus. He married Clytemnestra, the daughter of Tyndareous, the King of Sparta, and Leda. Agamemnon was elected commander of the Greek host that went to invade Troy to recover Helen, the wife of Menelaus, the King of Sparta, who was seduced by Paris, the prince of Troy. After the fall of Troy, when Agamemnon returned home, his wife Clytemnestra, with the help of her paramour, Aegisthus, murdered him. She was in turn slain by Orestes, Agamemnon's son.

Brute blood of the air—means Zeus in the form of Swan who forced Leda into sexual intercourse with him against her will. Hence, the appellation 'brute blood'.

Did she put on……her drop—being forced by Zeus into sexual intercourse with him, Leda put on his power. But did she also put on his knowledge before he let go his hold on her? Perhaps not. Because power and knowledge do not co-exist. They are mutually exclusive.

Paraphrase and Interpretation

The Greek mythological story of Leda and Zeus (or Jupiter) —Leda's rape by Zeus and the birth of Helen, Castor and Pollux, and Clytemnestra—is the theme of the sonnet, *Leda and the Swan*. A girl is bathing naked in a pond when a big bird suddenly swoops down upon her, caresses her thighs, holds her nape with his beak and presses her helpless breasts upon his own. The terrified girl feels helpless in the grip of the bird and her thighs loosen. A god, thus, sexually exploits a mortal woman. The incident had far-reaching consequences and a series of grim and gruesome events ensued. Leda gave birth to Helen who was responsible for the Trojan War. She also gave birth to Clytemnestra who brought about the tragedy of Agamemnon.

Nevertheless, it is a very complex poem, and can be read and understood at no less than three levels. (1) It can be taken as a retelling of the old story of the visit of Greek god Zeus in the form of a swan to Leda. (2) The poem can be seen as the artistic expression of his insight into Greek mythology. It was the divine wish to set a chain of events in motion that led Zeus to his seemingly unnatural union with the mother of mankind, Leda. She is the helpless and passive partner in all the tragic consequences resulting from the ways of destiny. (3) The poem can also be seen on a third level, as a fusion of two of the poet's magical beliefs. "One of these was the normal belief among the Occultists that copulation is the physical equivalent of spiritual union. That is why the mystics visualize their contact with God as an act of sex-congress ; the other was his belief that there are fateful times when new civilizations are born. As pointed out in connection with *The Second Coming*, such advents of new civilizations, according to the poet's belief, come every two thousand years. One such occasion was, when the Greek civilization came into existence, when Leda met the swan that was Zeus. The swan is of course, the symbol of the soul, and Leda of the body."

A Critical Appreciation of the Poem 'Leda and the Swan'

Leda and the Swan is one of the most famous and perfect poems of William Butler Yeats. It is a sonnet of fourteen lines. It was composed in the year 1923. It fuses mythology and history and depicts Yeats's view of the cyclic movement of civilization. The poem dramatically presents in a graphic manner the story of Leda and the Swan from the Greek mythology. In the Greek mythology, Leda was the mother of mankind ; Zeus or Jupiter appeared to her in the form of a Swan and raped her. As a result of this sexual act were born heroes and heroines who laid the foundation of a way of living called the Athenian civilization. Leda became the mother of Helen, Castor and Pollux, and Clytemnestra. This mythological story is thus the theme of this poem.

A girl is bathing naked in a pond when a big bird suddenly swoops down upon her, caresses her thighs, holds her nape with his beak and presses her helpless breasts upon his own. The girl is terrified She feels helpless in the grip of the bird and her thighs loosen. A god thus exploits a mortal woman. And out of this sexual union of the human with the superhuman are born great persons. Leda gave birth to Helen and Clytemnestra, and both of them were the causes of great tragedies.

The poem is very rich in suggestiveness. It suggests a crucial stage in the history of mankind when heavenly agency intervenes in mundane affairs of humanity. We are, thus, reminded of Virgin Mary and her dove, and of the advent of Christ two thousand years ago. The era of civilization commenced in the world following the sexual congress of an immortal god with a mortal woman of the human race. When it completed its destined cycle of years its second cycle began with the incarnation of a god. Now the second cycle is nearing its end and, therefore, superhuman power must intervene in some form or the other. Yeats's vision of the future of the human race is thus rooted in mythology.

The poem also reminds us that beautiful women have always been a cause of disaster. Helen the most beautiful woman of her age allowed herself to be seduced by the prince of Troy and eloped with him. That act of feminine folly led to the destruction of Troy. Another beautiful woman was Clytemnestra. She was the wife of a great hero Agamemnon. But she betrayed him and murdered him with her paramour's help. His death was avenged by his son who slew Clytemnestra in turn.

The poem reflects Yeats's occult beliefs and his philosophy of *A Vision*. It depicts Yeats's view of the cyclic movement of civilization. The solar wheels of the Principles and the lunar wheels of the Faculties, and every moment of time are parts of the primary or antithetical phase of more than one wheel. "The Greek civilization was antithetical and the Christianity was a primary phase. Yeats represents annunciation in the poem *Leda and the Swan.* This annunciation has been portrayed through the rape of Leda by the divine Swan."—(A. G. Stock). It is Zeus who in the garb of the swan appears and begets Helen leading to the destruction of Troy. Zeus's passion terrifies Leda in the beginning but later when she has become passionate, Zeus is unconcerned. Yeats explains: "I imagine the annunciation that founded Greece as made to Leda, remembering that they showed in a Spartan temple, stung up to the roof as a holy relic, an unhatched egg of hers : and that from one of her eggs came Love and from the other War. But all things are from antithesis, and when in my ignorance I try to imagine what older civilization that annunciation rejected, I can but see bird and woman blotting out some corner of the Babylonian mathematical starlight."

Leda and the Swan are the counterpart of Mary and her dove who ushered in the Christian civilization. While the Greek civilization was the harsher worship of blood, toil and tears, the Christian was one of passive, and non-violence era of love. By an inexhorable law, now that the Christian era is coming to an end, it is bound to be followed by a more violent age, such as the Greek era was. From this point of view the poem assumes the proportions of a prophecy. Rightly says Prof. Cleanth Brooks. "*Leda and the Swan*, far from being merely a pretty cameo, a stray object of art picked up from the ruins of older civilizations, has a vital relation to Yeats in his own civilization of the twentieth century."

As regards Yeats's occult beliefs, the poem gives expression of the two important ones : one of these was the normal belief among the Occultists that sexual union is the physical equivalent of spiritual union. (Some mystics visualize their contact with God as an act of sex-congress.) The other was his belief that there are fateful times when new civilizations are born.

Just see how graphic and dramatic the details are :

> "A sudden blow : the great wings beating still
> Above the staggering girl, thighs caressed
> By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
> He holds her helpless breast upon his breast."

Zeus comes in the form of a swan. With his wings beating he swoops over the staggering Leda and holds her. He catches her nape in his beak, caresses (kisses) her thighs. Then he holds her helpless breast upon his breast ; he embraces her and then starts the savage act of rape. The girl is too terrified. She is caught in the sexual orgy of the white bird and feels his beating heart against hers, and begins to get passionate :

> "How can those terrified vague fingers push
> The feathered glory from her loosening thighs ?

> And how can body, laid in that white rush
> But feel the strange heart beating where it lies ?"

The next two and a half lines are full of a sense of destiny in the fateful moment. The girl has conceived and the chain of history starts :

> "A shudder in the loins engenders there
> The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
> And Agamemnon dead."

The last three lines and a half tell us that the girl was so mastered by the brute blood of the air that she bore children to that union. This poet wants to know whether the girl shared the god's knowledge along with his power, before he left her indifferently and selfishly after the rape was committed.

> ....Being so caught up,
> So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
> Did she put on his knowledge with his power
> Before the indifferent beak could let her drop ?"

No doubt that the poem is based on the historical gyre in *A Vision*, and therefore it should be read along with *The Second Coming*. The poet sees Grecian civilization beginning with the myth of Leda. But the reader can enjoy the poem even without the knowledge of the system of Yeats. About *Leda and the Swan*, W. Y. Tyndall remarks : "Although *Leda and the Swan* springs from the system, it has an easy surface and an emotional impact which permit the unsubtle reader to enjoy it."

According to W. Y. Tyndall, the poem is symbolist in the sense that the manifest level is there to suggest unstated themes : the union of matter and spirit, of god and man, Dove and Virgin, and all the cycles of history which begin with these unnatural conjunctions. "The bird's rape of the human, the coupling of god and woman, the moment at which one epoch ended and another began, the antimonies engineering breast to beast, in the act which included all these. Yeats had the violent symbol for the transcendence of opposites which he needed."—(Ellmann). The poet has rendered the opposites of spirit and flesh, human and superhuman, knowledge and power, brute force and feminine helplessness, violence and passive sufferance, mythology and prophetic vision, creation and destruction. The poet's art opens vast vistas before the mental eye.

The poem like *The Second Coming* expresses the brute force and the violence and in this connection can also be related to the violence of *The Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*. The poet perhaps felt that civilized must be rejuvenated by the primitive, and that the Christian legend has led to undue depreciation of the physical. It is true, perhaps, as Synge once said, 'to be brutal.' The poem can be read in the modern context because when the poet writes of the mythological story of the savage rape of Leda, he had perhaps in mind the violence of the twentieth century Ireland, England and the world.

which raped the peace of the world. Arland Ussher says, "Nevertheless, the images of Leda's Swan and the burning roof of Troy are apt, for a contemporary reader, to start a different train of associations. One thinks inexitably of our iron dragon of the air, and the destruction of Guernica, and Warsaw ; not, in fact of a refertilization of the sophisticated by the natural, but of the complete annihilation of nature by science......The youth of Europe, accustomed to lifting up their eyes to the heavens from which shall come their ruin, would not one fears, read Yeats with complete sympathy. *Leda and the Swan* is a great poem, but the cenception is too inhuman to produce a great drama."

R. P. Blackmur has said that there is extraordinary sensual immediacy in the poem. The 'words meet and move like speaking lips.' The sensual appeal is found in many of the poems of Yeats. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, the poet speaks of 'the young in one another's arms.' In this poem the poet has suggested the savage act of rape, conception and copulation. The swan swoops over the staggering girl, caresses her thighs, catches her nape in his bill and holds her helpless breast upon his breast. It suggests that he now lies on her and the savage act is soon to be committed. Then the poet speaks of the 'loosening thighs' of Leda. The thighs loosen after the love drama has been played. One should note carefully the phrase 'the loosening thighs', and the whiteness of the bird is concentrated all the sensuality of touch. "Shudder is the sensual act, the moment of orgasm, as all husbandmen know ; but it is also anticipation in fear."

To quote **Dr. B. Rajan**, "*Leda and the Swan*, one of the most unimprovable poems ever written, is the final fusion of history, myth and vision. Using the sonnet form, which is employed traditionally for love and public issues, Yeats writes a poem which is about both and neither. Except for the daringly judged break in the eleventh line, the formal requirements are rigorously observed and the great power of compression, which can force such massive themes into so brief and tightly controlled a compass, finds its reward in the power and richness of the poem. Yeats did not come to this perfection easily. Ellmann shows that at least six stages of revision were needed and that it was not until the second published version that Yeats achieved the onslaught of the first line, the 'sudden blow', the impact of which is the poem."

Melchiori tells us that the sources of Yeats's sonnet include, besides Michelangelo, '*the Hupnerotomachia*, Spenser, Shelley, Pater, Moreau, Blake and the Theosophists.' Other scholars have suggested alternatives and the search for pictorial origins, in particular, has been pursued with a zest that makes one wonder whether the anatomy of Leda is truly to be found in the art galleries of Europe. It is not simply that everything that enters the poem is transformed in its creativeness so that, like all great art, it is radically unlike the element it absorbs. The poem also lives in its immediacy so that whatever it means must be reached through its impact. Bird and woman blot out the Babylonian mathematical starlight and Yeats himself tells us that as he wrote *Leda* all politics went out of it.

Unterecker analyses the poem in the following manner, and brings out its metres and imagery :

"Everything in the poem contributes to this design. Even rhythm itself underlines the shifting passions of the two characters. The five anapaests literally move Leda through the poem staggering her, loosening thighs, letting her be caught up and finally letting her drop (...The deliberately Freudian imagery the white rush, the broken wall, the burning roof and tower, to name only the most obvious), the puns on such words as laid and lies, the ambiguities inherent in 'those terrified vague fingers' (visually vague because in spite of the fingers' terror, thighs already loosened to the equally ambiguous feathered glory), the unanswerable question that ends the poem all serve to bind up into 'a classical enunciation' a poem no part of which does not function in all the other parts." The Freudian symbol with their sexual references have enhanced the effect of the poem.

Miss A. G. Stock has elucidated the meaning of Leda's eggs and birth of civilizations therefrom :

"From Leda's eggs came the twins, Castor and Pollux and Helen of Troy and her twin Clytemnestra—Love and Strife. A third egg, never hatched, was according to Yeats once hung in a Spartan temple : when the time comes for the breaking of its shell, something hidden in the remote past will emerge to shape the future." So the third egg is unhatched future. The new civilization will emerge from the ashes of the old ones.

A critic like Dr. Rajan says, "From the very beginning the line of attack is plain. The 'sudden blow' (replacing the indecisive 'hoverings' of earlier drafts), the 'dark webs' with their suggestion of an irresistible, inscrutable fate (superseding the needless anatomical detail of 'webbed toes'), the 'great wings' contrasted in their power with the 'staggering', 'helpless' girl and the enfolding movement of the fourth line (reinforced by the repetition of 'breast'), all suggest a controlled and crushing violence, indifferent to everything but its apocalyptic function. Then, the second stanza moves us into Leda's stunned acquiescence with 'vague', 'feathered', 'loosening' and 'white rush' progressively suggesting her collapse of identity while driving onward the basic assault of the poem. The inescapable contrast is between power and helplessness ; and the recognition made violently real by the poem is that any revolutionary change in the direction of history must seem at the point of change, to be the product of superior and, indeed, overwhelming force. The virgin is always fierce and empires must always stand appalled whenever she calls out of the fabulous, formless darkness. The 'strange heart' which takes over Leda's being does so in the moment of death which is the quick of all crisis.

"Then turn into the sestet is masterfully contrived with the sound shuddering through the ninth line, out of the act and into its consequences. The movement into time reveals starkly that violence is the fruit of violence while the obvious overtones of 'broken wall' and 'burning roof' link the future firmly to the foreground. The break in the eleventh line is not so much a return to the present as a movement from embodiment to questioning; the question is asked because the poem has both created and answered it :

> '.......................Being so caught up,
> So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
> Did she put on his knowledge with his power
> Before the indifferent beak could let her drop ?'

"The repeated so ought not to be evaded. It is not in the abstract, but in the context of the poem's actual onslaught, that the reader's judgment is required to be made ; and the forces that have 'caught up' and 'mastered' Leda have never been presented as other than irresistible, apocalyptic violence. The double savagery of 'brute blood', underlined by the alliteration and the two meanings of blood, is typical in directing our response ; and the slack, detumescent monosyllables of the last line are indicative both of lust satisfied and a historical purpose fulfilled. Time and thought may make the proportions different but in the crisis, in the explosion of truth, every annunciation is revealed in power and terror."

Leda and the Swan, therefore, is a poem which is rich in its originality and suggestiveness. It is a perfect sonnet. Everything in it contributes to the design. Even rhythm itself underlines the shifting passions of the two characters. The deliberate Freudian imagery is there. There are images that suggest so much, tell more than they mean. There are rich suggestive phrases like the 'loosening thighs', 'the white rush', 'the beating heart' all of which suggest sexual orgy. And when we read of the broken wall, the whole history of the Trojan War dances before our eyes.

Behind the poem there is phonetic subtlety, the change of speed and tension. The poem is classical in its elegance and choice of words. The poem starts with the suddenness of a storm. Everything is dramatically conceived. Everything is concentrated and condensed. Everything is compressed, and out of such a concentration, compression and conception the poem rises to the lofty heights. At last, the Swan becomes the symbol of the soul, Leda of the body.

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LINES WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

Introduction and Interpretation

Lines Written in Dejection is a lyric of eleven lines vindicating his occult philosophy enunciated in his work *A Vision.* Yeats expressed his occult philosophy which he expressed through his plays and poems. The division of human personality into solar and lunar phases representing objectivity and subjectivity is a vital element of that philosophy.

In *Lines Written in Dejection*, the poet sees himself, after fifty, moving into the solar phase of his life :

> "When I have looked on
> The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies
> Of the dark leopards of the moon ?
> All the wild witches, those most noble ladies,
> For all their broom-sticks and their tears,
> Their angry tears are gone.
> The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished ;
> I have nothing but the embittered sun ;
> Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,
> And now that I have come to fifty years
> I must endure the timid sun."

" 'The heroic moon' of the self-realization has vanished and the 'timid sun' of objectivity has to be endured. But the progress is also from dream to reality, the wild witches who are also noble ladies have ceased to exercise their fascination over the poet and he can now move into the bleak landscape of the 'embittered' but de-romanticized sun. Timidity is in any case hardly the sun's primary characteristic ; the inconsistency invites us to read the poem ironically and perhaps suggests that the poet is capable of defeating even his own system." —(B. Rajan).

Nevertheless, the poet is fifty and has entered the solar phase of his personality. The lunar phase of his personality which was characterized by his fancifulness and love of wild dream has passed. The wild witches, who are most noble ladies, are gone and the 'holy centaurs of the hills' also have disappeared. Now he is to endure the 'timid sun' and will have 'a new masculine realism' and objectivity.

The poem was included in the volume of poems entitled *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919).

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21

MEN IMPROVE WITH THE YEARS

Introduction

Men Improve with the Years is a poem from Yeats's volume of poems entitled *The Wild Swans at Coole*, published in 1919. It was a time of great personal and general calamities for Yeats. The First World War, the death of Hugh Lane and Easter Rising of 1916, the threatened dismemberment of Lady Gregory's estate, the death of Maud Gonne's husband (MacBride) and Maud Gonne's final rejection of Yeats, Iseult Gonne's rejection of him, his hasty marriage, the death of Robert Gregory ; all these events and others rushed pell-mell as Yeats who, at last almost secure financially, was during these years arranging for the purchase and rehabilitation of that Ballylee Tower in which he hoped finally to settle down. Most of the poems in the collection (*The Wild Swans at Coole*) deal with death and the old age followed by the Mask poems. The whole volume moves through the death of friends and the persistence of love to a harsher world with which the light of the vision dominates. The swans at Coole are symbolic of life-force, unity of transitoriness and permanence, and the poetic inspiration or imagination. The swans are vigorous and powerful.

Men Improve with the Years is one of the 'love' poems of the first group of the collection (*The Wild Swans at Coole*). Growing old is the theme of these poems in which 'The living beauty is for younger men', and dumb-bells which prolong the day of youth cannot arrest the ageing of the heart. But men continue to improve with the years, and those that have paid the price of service to beauty (the world enlarges subtly to suggest both the artistic and the physical ideal) will dine at journey's end with Landor and with Donne. The pairing is an unusual one reflects in, perhaps, Landor's membership of the seventeenth century crescent and Yeats's enthusiastic reading of Grierson's *Donne*.—(See B. Rajan, *W. B. Yeats : A Critical Introduction*, pp. 110-11).

So in *Men Improve with the Years* the central theme is man's improvement with the years. The poem evinces a common belief that man goes on attaining wisdom as he grows in age. The poet in this poem shows a sense of satisfaction which he will drive while he is ageing and he will also improve. He is fed up with dreams and is 'weather-worn marble triton' among the streams. "Echoing the picture book phrase" from the 'Major Gregory' poem, 'he comments ironically on his own improvement with age. Age's wisdom gives him possibilities of aesthetic delight in the contemplation of a girl (Iseult Gonne, the daughter of Maud Gonne), but 'burning youth' —the sort Robert Gregory had, is gone. His own once passionate flesh—now 'weatherworn'—has hardened to cold marble."—(Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to Yeats*, pp. 134-35).

According to Dr. B. Rajan, *Men Improve with the Years* is described by Kenner as counter-rhetoric to the *Irish Airman*. The poem has sufficient irony to suggest that the Triton worn out with dreams may have wisdom on his side and that withering away may have as much to commend it as dying self-expressively."—(*W. B. Yeats : A Critical Introduction*, p. 110).

This theme of old age and attainment of wisdom is further deepened in another poem, *Lines Written in Dejection*.

The first few lines in *Men Improve with the Years* describe the poet's physical decrepitude ; he is aware of his age and looks at the girl with a contemplative detachment appropriate to old men. Although he has lost youthful zest and vigour, there is consolation in the newly-gained wisdom that age has given him. Suddenly the mood changes ; the tone shifts from the calm quietitude of

"Delighted to be but wise,
For men improve with the years ;"

to the hesitant half-whisper of

"And yet, and yet,
Is this my dream, or the truth ?"

and reaches finally a poignant, burning intensity in the lines

"O would that we had met
When I had my burning youth !"

The phrase

"A weather-worn, marble triton
Among the streams"

has different emotional contexts. In the beginning, it suggests a mood of calm serenity ; in the end, it conveys a sense of pathetic desperation.

"The complexity of tones alone," says B. Chatterjee, "however, does not explain the beauty of the poem. The vocative power of the images and their overtones must also be explored. The lines

"A weather-worn, marble triton
Among the streams"

convey the image of sea-waves splashing on the shore and the sound of water slashing against the weather-beaten rock. The mythical association of *Triton* brings in new overtones—Triton was a Greek merman who carried a sea-shell, which he blew to bring storms or calms, and who assisted the Argonauts when their ship went ashore ; thus, it represents not only age and wisdom, but also superhuman power. The associative meaning, thus, becomes more complex. The poet may be worn with age, but he can evoke powers that can work miracles. Does it refer to this power of making poetry of a cold marble-like quality ?"

22

NEWS FOR THE DELPHIC ORACLE

An Introduction to the Poem

The poem has been included in the selection *Last Poems and Plays.* It has been called "a laughing, crying, sacred song, a leching song." It is one of those songs which has been charged for the open glorification of sexuality and of mocking at the great in a tone of levity and flippancy. But at the same time it has a deeper significance which becomes apparent not at first reading but at the second and careful reading of the lyric.

On the Island of Delphi near Greece was the famous temple of Apollo. The priestess of the temple, inspired by the god, could utter profound truths and foretell the future. In Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, we are told that after the death of the great philosopher (Plotinus) his friends went to the Oracle at Delphi to know from her the whereabouts of their friend. They were told that the great man had crossed the *Sea of Life* and reached *Elysium* or *the Island of the Blessed* (in Greek mythology) without having to undergo the usual process of purification. In the present poem of three stanzas (each stanza containing twelve lines), the poet supposes that he himself has crossed the Sea of Life and reached the Elysium across it.

Word-meanings and Explanation

Oracle—the answer spoken or uttered by the gods.

Codgers—fellows.

Delphic—of Delphi, an Island near Delphi where there was the temple of Apollo and people went to hear the oracle of gods.

Golden—because they have been purged of all that is impure and material. The golden codgers and the silver dew are solar and lunar principles, now met and become one.

Niamh—an Irish goddess.

'Great water' and 'mind'—are symbolic of the masculine and feminine principles respectively.

Man-picker—one who runs after men.

Straddling—riding astride

Peleus—the father of Achilles who figured as a hero in the Trojan War according to Greek mythology.

Thetis—in Greek mythology the goddess Thetis who was the mother of Achilles.

Pan—a Satyr. Satyrs were forest gods according to Greek mythology. They had legs and feet of a goat and horns.

Dolphin—a fabulous creature of the whale type mentioned in classical mythology. It was distinguished for its quick movement.

Paraphrase

Stanza 1

In the first stanza, the poet surveys the scene that bursts upon his view on reaching the shores of the Island of the Blessed. There he beholds a number of great men resting in the midst of pleasant surroundings. The Irish goddess Niamh lies beside Oisin, and Pythagoras lies surrounded by singing angels. Shortly afterwards there arrives Plotinus with salt-flakes sticking all over his person, as though he had just crossed the Sea of Life. In conformity with the characterstic of mythology, the poet affirms that in the *Island of the Blessed* there is no sound heard except that of sighing. The winds and waters there all sigh as do the inhabitants in the place.

Thus, in the first stanza, "the poet simply takes account of those who, having crossed the Sea of Life, are lying on the grass They are called 'the golden codgers', golden because they have no dross in them, codgers, because the poet is on terms of easy familiarity with them, 'chaps'. Niamh and Oisin (Celtic gods celebrated in the poet's *Wandering of Oisin*) are there ; Niamh is called 'a man-picker', which is not a very respectable way of addressing a goddess, but that is what, in terms of our culture, she was, and the poet will call a spade a spade. The choir of Love was there and made for an amorous atmosphere. Tall Pythagoras himself was sighing ; Plotinus also came in, but he still had the salt flakes (evidence of his swimming the Sea of Life). He did not exactly like the atmosphere, stood yawning, and then lay down, like the rest, sighing. (In Dante's 'Limbo', where the Platonists were dumped, nothing was heard except sighing). The golden codgers and the silver dew are solar and lunar principles, now met and become one ; the 'great water' of the third line, and 'mind' of the fourth stand for the masculine and the feminine principles respectively. They are all now living in perfect amity."

—(B. P. Misra).

Stanza 2

In the second stanza other arrivals are mentioned. They arrive seated on the back of dolphins, the creatures mentioned in Greek mythology. But, unlike Plotinus, they have to pass through a purificatory process on reaching the shores of the Elysium. They mentally relive their past lives, and have to suffer again the agony they had suffered earlier. They rebecome children, so to say, and expiate for their sins. Finally, they are thrown off by the dolphins in some cliff-sheltered valley where they have to stay till the time of their rebirth arrives. The images of the dead straddling on the back of the Dolphins, and their being pitched off like so many bags, further accentuates the vein of levity that runs through the poem. Hence, in this stanza, we see the innocent carried off on the dolphin's back. The 'ecstatic waters' laugh. The innocent have been transported to the land of immortality and their burdens off in some bay surrounded by cliff, where wades the 'choir of love'. This is also a news to the

Delphic Oracle that the choir of love offers its sacred laurel crowns to the newly arrived.

According to Prof. Misra, "The second stanza is a description of what happens to souls less lucky than Plotinus (who was permitted to live there without any purificatory rites). Others, after being brought on the backs of the dolphins, have to relive their lives in memory. So their wounds open again. They become like children and expiate their past lives. Then they are carried to some cliff-sheltered bay and 'pitched' there—tossed there, just as any coolies might toss parcel packages in the godown."

Stanza 3

The third and the last stanza describes the sexuality and copulation which goes on in this abode of the great and the good. A youth is stripped naked by a nymph, and Peleus, the father of Achilles, in Greek mythology, stares at the delicate body of goddess Thetis, the mother of Achilles. In the underground caverns of the satyr Pan, copulation goes on, naked forms often rise into view from below. It is a lewd dance of sexuality that nymphs and satyrs dance in that heavenly abode. The use of words considered obscene as 'bum' or words with a sexual overtone as 'belly', 'stripped' etc., accentuates the levity as well as the sexuality of the poem. In this stanza, we see that the immortals are singing and dancing. From Pan's cavern unbearable music is audible. Peleus stares at Thetis whose belly listens to Pan's pipe. Her limbs are delicate. They may join nymphs and satyrs copulating in foam.

The third stanza describes episodically the way out from the Island of the Blessed. Not all who go and stay there. The vast majority has to get out. The first four lines describe the love of Peleus (the father of Achilles) with Thetis (a goddess, the mother of Achilles). Here was a love-affair between a mortal and a goddess. Theirs was a pure love, as the poet believed his own love for Maud Gonne to have been. Pure love which remains unfulfilled on earth is consummated in that place, so that the poet could reasonably hope that he will have better success with Maud Gonne there than on earth. But Thetis the goddess, listens to some low music from the cavern of Pan, the goat-footed god of lust, her nature being divided. In this cavern of Pan, lustful things are happening. The nymphs and fauns who dance in seemingly lewd ways of love, are the souls who though for the time being in heaven are going to be born again. And so the poem ends, after having sketched the tragicomedy of birth, death and rebirth.

A Critical Appreciation of 'News for the Delphic Oracle'

News for the Delphic Oracle is one of the last poems of Yeats. It, too, is a fusion of mythology and history, and is open to attack for its tone of levity and flippancy, although it has been called "a laughing, crying, sacred song, a leching song". The title of the poem is justified. The poet visits Elysium and brings news of the merry goings-on in that abode of the blessed. He knows more than the priestess of the Delphi who used to foretell the future to the people (in Greek mythology). He thinks that his news must serve to correct the exaggerated hero-worship that is rendered to the great.

The poet has advocated a reconstruction and recreation of mythology and has enshrined them in his plays and poems. Here he has fused the Irish and the Greek mythologies which have created a land of fantasy and imagination.

The tone of the poem sounds familiar and flippant by the use of slang words like 'Codgers' (fellows) and 'man-picker'. Yeats faithfully follows the tracks of mythology when he avers that in the Island of the Blessed there is no sound save that of sighing. The winds, waters and even the spirits dwelling there give out sighs.

It is a lewd exhibition of sexuality when a youth is stripped naked by a nymph, and naked forms, copulating in underground caverns, often emerge into view. The use of obscene terms, such as 'bum', or words like 'belly', 'stripped', etc. put into relief the levity and sexuality of the poem.

However, it is not all mere flippancy and obscenity, Yeats has thereby emphasized that the body which is merely physical, is not to be hated or abhorred. Even the gods do not treat it with contempt and do not disdain it. The body must not be allowed to languish for the sake of the soul. Further, physical copulation is indispensable for propagation of species and rear generations. The cycle of birth-death-rebirth cannot be complete without it. In spite of seeming flippancy, the poet's mood of levity is pregnant with substance and meaning. The poet reminds us of what Yeats said in his poem *Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop*.

Here symbols and images speak for themselves. They justify what Yeats had once written, "I must leave my myths and images to explain themselves as the years go by and one poem lights up another." The whole poem is woven by a net of images from Greek and Irish mythology and ancient philosophy. The Delphic Oracle, Peleus, Thetis, Pan, nymphs and satyrs bring to our mind the aura of the Greek mythology whereas Niamh and Oisin are yoked from the Irish mythology. Then come tall Pythagoras, Plotinus and other innocent souls. The picture of the Blessed Island not only conforms to the mythological portrait, but also is remarkable for its vividness and art. Mark the imagery in the stanza below :

> "Slim adolescence that a nymph has stripped,
> Peleus on Thetis stares.
> Her limbs are delicate as an eyelid,
> Love has blinded him with tears ;
> But Thetis' belly listens.
> Down the mountain walls
> From where Pan's cavern is
> Intolerable music falls.
> Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear,
> Belly, shoulder, bum,
> Flesh fishlike ; nymphs and satyrs
> Copulate in the foam.

23

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETEEN

Introduction

The 'horror-stricken poem or series of poems', *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* arose out of Lady Gregory's account of the atrocities committed by the Blacks and Tans in different parts of Ireland. The war was just over, but in Ireland things were far from peaceful. Old sense of values was fast disappearing ; law and order were things of the past. Yeats had always been something of a Conservative ; sight of revolutionary conditions upset him. So in this long poem, he set out to analyse the decay of the liberal tradition. As Prof. Stock observes, "Yeats seems to be realizing in his nerves things that brain and imagination had grasped already, and understanding deepens the horror at the same time that it just manages to control it." So intense is the feeling that he is carried out of himself ; usually he writes in the singular, as himself or one of three or four dramatis personae who are voices of himself, but here for once he says 'we' as if he were the voice of humanity.

Section 1

Word-meanings and Notes

Phidias—the superb master of Greek art and culture, a famous Greek sculptor (500-432 B C.)

Weasel—a small animal having a flexible body, supposed to be craftily cruel and cunning.

Some intoxicant—some false philosophy, slogan or cliches.

Acropolis—the fortified part of the town of Athens in Greece.

Stump—a mutilated broken statue.

Ghostly solitude—what this 'ghostly solitude' means is not easy to say. Graham Hough says that this is the most "difficult question offered by Yeats's later poetry. Phrases about the death-wish come easily into the mind ; some of the imagery fits easily into the categories of Christian mysticism. But explanations along either of these lines are either inadequate or wrong." But the other interpretation may be given in terms of the ideal of the steady mind as propounded in the *Gita*.

Paraphrase

The first section consists of six stanzas, consisting of eight lines each. The poem begins in the tone of cultured conversation. The first section mourns the disappearance of many things of art like the ancient figures made out of imperishable olive wood, and the famous sculpture (ivory) pieces of Phidias (500-432 B. C. None of his statues is in existence but he is supposed to have been the greatest Greek sculptor). The magnificent art of Athens has proved as transient and temporary as grasshoppers and bees of a summer season. The course of history runs in cycles and our own civilization must meet its doom. We have built a legal system which, in our opinion, is inviolate and lasting. A strong public opinion has been mobilized to buttress our institutions. We hope that our civilization will abide and endure, for we think that we live in an ideal age when rogues and rascals have all been wiped out of existence. But all that is a dream and delusion. Indeed our customs, laws, traditions and opinions are no better than toys that do not last long. Our civilization is also getting dark and dusky. It is unrealistic to maintain that war and bloodshed are horrors of the past. The present is also full of formidable forebodings. There is terror and torture everywhere. Innocent wives and mothers are being slaughtered, and the slaughterers are able to walk away uncaught and unpunished. A band of drunken soldiers is out to kill and devastate. Hence, the days are dragon-ridden, and the nightmare rides upon sleep. There is no peace either by day or by night. All indications go to show that our two thousand year-old civilization and accomplishments are about to go to pieces. The doomsday seems to be near. Disaster is sure to overtake us, and magnificent works of art produced by artists at the cost of their health, wealth and peace of mind, are not likely to enjoy a long lease of life. Philosophy or any otherwise counsel can do us no good because we have degraded ourselves to the category of beasts, like weasels fighting in a hole. Human traits and tendencies have suffered an eclipse everywhere in the world. In the view of some selected few there is still a way of comfort open. This is drawn away from life to ghostly solitude. But that sort of detached seclusion is in love and he loves what vanishes. We are booked to meet the fate which overtook Babylon, Egypt and Athens. The prospect is grim but there is also a consolatory side to it. The human spirit will survive the impending catastrophe just as it has survived similar onslaughts and calamities. Creation-destruction-recreation is the law of Nature. We should derive whatever comfort we can from this law.

Section II

Word-meanings and Notes

Loie Fuller—an American lady dancer of note who was the poet's contemporary. She thrilled the spectators by her serpentine dance. She had some Chinese dancers included in her troupe.

The Platonic year—A cycle of history. The poet means the dance of history. We the human beings are all dancers in the dance of history, and the various ages (old and new) symbolize its rhythms. Otherwise it was a cycle of history imagined by some ancient astronomers in which the heavenly bodies were to return to their original relative positions'; sometimes identified with the period of the revolution of the equinoxes (about 25,800 years). Here the poet means the dance of history.

Barbarous......gong—the whirlwind of death and destruction.

Paraphrase

In the second section of the poem, we are reminded of the famous American dancer, Loie Fuller, and her troupe of dancers. She would throw a ribbon of cloth into air, creating a dragonlike figure which would seem to fall upon the dancers and control their dancing steps. Similarly, we are dancers to the measure of the Platonic year and we are whirled around upon its furious path, with the gong's wild beating announcing the end of each era. Like dancers, whose feet obey the rhythm, men are not free agents but are controlled by the dragon of reality. They cannot escape being pushed on to a predetermined goal. But each must act or dance to the best of his ability. No one should shirk the efforts and surrender in the face of adversity.

Section III

Word-meanings and Notes

Platonists—a group of philosophers whose headquarters were Cambridge University and who flourished in the middle of the 17th century.

Crack-pated—foolish ; silly.

Paraphrase

In the third section, we are reminded that human soul has often been likened to a swan flying high into the human soul proudly breathing in the air and speedily flying away from the horror and carnage of the present age pervading dread and darkness. However, such thoughts and images do not give him any consolation whatsoever. Man's soul is lost in the mesh and maze of his own work of art or politics or his dream of improving the affairs of the world. Therefore in accord with the teaching of Plotinus, if one wants to forget the grimness of reality one must destroy all his works, all that he has created. In this way, the picture of the swan flying away from reality fills the poet's soul with a destructive rage. To seek solitude and detachment, merely flying away like the swan will not serve the purpose. The soul will still be attracted by the glitter and glamour of its achievements or by foolish and fantastic dreams it had cherished. A rage to annihilate both the past and the half-born future seems to have seized the poet.

Sections IV, V & VI

Word-meanings and Notes

Herodias' daughter—Herod or Herodias was the Roman governor of Palestine. His daughter was offended with John the Baptist and had his severed head brought to her on a plate. She caused much persecution to the Christians. In Yeats's mind, she was associated with Sidhe of Irish mythology and symbolized the forces of destruction.

The insolent fiend Robert Artisson—Robert Artisson was the 14th century incubus of Dame Alice Kyteler who was brought before the Inquisition in 1374. The fiend was supposed to haunt Kilkenny and was associated with cats.

Dame Alice Kyteler—she was supposed to have some traffic with the fiend Robert Artisson. She was tried before the Inquisition in 1374, and Yeats had studied the proceedings with keen interest in the British Museum.

Kilkenny Cats—the origin of the allusion is said to be as follows :—During the rebellion of 1798, or may be of 1803, Kilkenny was garrisoned by a regiment of Hessian soldiers whose custom it was to tie together two cats by their tails and throw them across a clothes-line. The cats fought until one or both died.

A blast of dusty wind blows—the expression symbolizes the destruction as well as the great destroyer in Irish mythology.

Incubus—a demon who haunts or possesses a person and causes night terrors.

Paraphrase

In the fourth section, a comparison is instituted between the past and the present, and the failure and frustration that has occurred is described. Before the Irish rebellion, as far back as seven years hence, they used to swear by honour and truth. But now they have become cunning, cruel and brutal like the weasel. This moral degeneration is the most deplorable kind of tragedies that can befall mankind. The grovelling in blood and mire is worse than wholesale annihilation.

In the fifth section, the poet holds up to ridicule those great who toil hard and late to leave behind some monument, but all their efforts are of no avail before the levelling wind. He laughs derisively at the wise because all their wise and brilliant philosophic thoughts serve them no better and they end in fiasco at long last. The good may take pride in their goodness, but that, too, does not save them from the sweep of the levelling wind. Finally, the poet derides the mockers like his own self for they, too, live and labour under the delusion like the great, the good and the wise. All their mockery fails to bar the foul storm out. Destruction is an awful reality and nothing can stem the advance of its engulfing tide.

The last section is a fast moving scene of violent images and the forces of nihilism move towards climax. It presents to our view a graphic picture of the terrors and tortures inflicted on Ireland and also upon the wide world. Violence is rampant on all sides. Mounted soldiers move about dealing out death and destruction and in the end falling down themselves wearied and exhausted from severity of strain. Evil seems to be ascending all round. Herodias' daughters seem to be out and abroad once again. They symbolize a situation which evil gathers head. A blast of dusty wind sweeps over and across the land which symbolizes the destruction of the world. Anarchic violence prevails all over and all sense of direction seems to have been lost. All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries, according to the wind, for all are blind. The wind subsides and the dust settles down, and yet there is no relief. For there is now seen the demonic figure of the fiend, Robert Artisson, the incubus of Dame Alice Kyteler who had supposedly some traffic with him.

A Critical Appreciation of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'

The Poem, *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*, appeared in both countries in 1921 in literary journals, and in the volume entitled *The Tower* (1928). The English tried to crush the Irish movement with a cruel hand, and employed their hirelings, the Blacks and the Tans, to crush the nationalistic forces in Ireland that had gained strength. Their attention was towards Germany also. "The Blacks and Tans and the Auxiliaries were recklessly used to frighten Ireland into submission to 'Law and Order'. Yeats in this poem perceives the destruction of the social institutions and the great art-things without showing any perturbation. "His object," says Unterecker, "is to see destruction accurately, to record precisely the Civil War and the larger international destruction that it foreshadows."

The poem is described oddly by Yeats as 'not philosophical but simple and passionate, a lamentation over lost peace and lost hope.' It begins as a lament for Athens :

> "Many ingenious lovely things are gone
> That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
> Protected from the circle of the moon
> That pitches common things about. There stood
> Amid the ornamental bronze and stone
> An ancient image made of olive wood—
> And gone are Phildias' famous ivories
> And all the golden grasshoppers and bees."

In fact, the tone is anything but elegiac. It is driven and controlled by moral indignation which both shapes it and secures it from the abyss which its vehemence skirts. The technique is evident from the first stanza, when the ancient image made from the imperishable olive tree at Colonus and the famous ivories of Phildias' art (to Yeats the zenith of Grecian civilization) are made to pass away like the grasshoppers and bees of a transient summer. The theme develops further in the startling comparison of public opinion and inviolable law to the 'pretty toys' which a society discards in its maturity. Then the grim fulfilment of the maturity explodes :

> "Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
> Rides upon sleep : a drunken soldiery
> Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
> To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free ;
> The night can sweat with terror as before
> We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
> And planned to bring the world under a rule,
> Who are but weasels fighting in a hole."

In the face of Ireland he is reading the defeat of two thousand years of human endeavour :

> "He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
> Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant

From shallow wits ; who knows no work can stand
Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
On master-work of intellect or hand,
No honour leave its mighty monument,
Has but one comfort left ; all triumph would
But break upon his ghostly solitude.”

The unimaginable, that happened to Babylon and the Egypt and to Athens, is happening to men now ; and it is no consolation, but a bleak fact, that the human spirit will survive it.

The poem is in six sections, each of different length and in different metre. The first section consists of six stanzas consisting of eight lines each. As always with this poet during his mature years, the poem begins in the tone of cultured conversation.

The first stanza mourns the disappearance of many things of art (including the ivory models of the works of Phildias (500-432 B.C.). The second stanza refers to the personal collection of the poet and his generation and their belief that “rogues and rascals had died out.” The third stanza dwells on the public belief that armies and fights were things of the past, but the next stanza disillusions us. A drunken soldiery can murder peaceful mothers and wives and escape detection or punishment. (The reference is to the ‘Blacks and Tans’ —a band of hirelings that the British government employed to suppress the Irish). The picture is very disheartening. We are so very near savagery and yet we talk of philosophy—“We, who are but weasels fighting in a hole.” In the next stanza the poet suggests one way of dealing with the situation—the thoughtful soul must retire into “ghostly solitude.”...The last stanza of this section denies that there is any comfort to be found. It is enough to remember that “Man is in love and loves what vanishes.” Once upon a time no one would think of destroying even the “stump on the Acropolis.”

The second section takes the reader’s thoughts away from the dreary present to an American lady dancer, Loie Fuller (1862-1928). The poet remembers one of her Chinese dancers who could whirl people off their feet. In a similar manner, the poet tells us that the Platonic year makes people dance wildly and out of tune :

“When Loie Fuller’s Chinese dancers enwound
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
It seemed that a dragon of air
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
Or hurled them off on its own furious path.”

As Miss Stock observes, “The symbol is subtle, for the dragon seems to control men, and is created by them ; and yet again, since they are not free-stepping men but dancers, the dragon only makes visible the predetermined rhythm their feet obey. It is as if the poet retrated to a vast distance where particulars are obliterated and time congealed into a form, and the shape of all creation becomes visible. It has the force of sudden, absolute detachment, like death, severing the soul from its creations and flinging it upon its own solitude—the leap of the swan into the desolate heaven.

> "Some Platonist affirms that in the station
> Where we should cast off body and trade
> The ancient habit sticks,
> And that if out works could
> But vanish our breath
> That were a lucky death,
> For triumph can but mar our solitude."

Suddenly, the awareness of solitude becomes an intense excitement, that is seen in a momentary flash to be in itself the impulse of destruction :

> "The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven ;
> That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
> To end all things."

So we are told that human soul is like a swan. It will be very good if one could see himself like one, ready to fly away in the face of difficulties. The first stanza of the third section tells us about such self-realization. Then in the next stanza the poet tells us that man tends to lose himself, while anxious to mediate, in the thoughts provoked by his routine work—art or politics. In view of the above consideration, we should be able to destroy all we have done, and remember that when we planned to build a better world, we were silly.

The fourth section is the smallest, containing only four lines. It points out that we, who seven years earlier (about the year 1912), boasted of honour and truth, have become crafty and clever and cruel :

> "We, who seven years ago
> Talked of honour and of truth,
> Shriek with pleasure if we show
> The weasel's twist, the weasel's touch."

The fifth section, consisting of four stanzas makes use of the refrain tactics, each beginning with "Come let us mock" or a variation thereof, because we are trafficking in mockery. We do not take ourselves seriously.

The last section is a vivid description of the terrors which have been unleashed on the world. The daughters of Herodias have returned again. A sudden blast of dusty wind has also come in and signifies the end of the world. "The last part," remarks Stock, "is a whirl of violent images, beauty dissolving in delirium as the times worsen, and ending, as if to clamp the whole meditation down to Ireland, with 'an evil spirit much run after in Kilkenny at the start of the fourteenth century' :

> "There lurches past, his great eyes without thought
> Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks,
> That insolent fiend Robert Artisson

> To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought
> Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks."

So finally Robert Artisson, the fourteenth-century fiend arrives to end the poem. Pure nightmare, he moves always with his thoughtless stupid eyes under that circle of moon that pitches common things about. The poet in this poem is "like a baffled lover raging at the world, and taking a vow of celibacy ; at one minute exulting in freedom, at the next furious over failure. But there is the courage of tragedy in refusing any false reconcilement. His poetry is what he said civilization was a struggle for control ; the passion must be powerful enough to wrestle with an angel and this only is the first round of the match."—(A. G. Stock).

According to Dr. B. Rajan, *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* derives its strength as well as failings from its angry and passionate involvement. The poet, too, is the victim of a nihilism so corrosive that even the timeless triumphs of the imagination are pitched about in the 'circle' of history. In the last section, the forces of nihilism gather for their climax. The 'violence of horses' echoes the apocalypse. Herodias' daughters, whom Yeats associates with the Sidhe, and who according to Jeffares are taken from Arthur Symons' poem *The Dance of the Daughters of Herodias*, embody a situation in which 'evil gathers head'. The 'labyrinth of another's being' from which the poet had turned aside in *The Tower*.

According to some critics, the poem suffers from incoherence. Stock concludes that the last 'for all its energy......is as near to despair and to utter loss of control as the end of any poem Yeats ever wrote.' Reid considers that 'Yeats's passion here is really frantic and compensatory.'

On the whole, the poem is very powerful. It has a torrential eloquence. It has some very fine phrases which seem as inevitable as those of Pope himself. The poem is felt deep down his heart. There is no pretence at a superior wisdom, but a determination to see things steadily and to see them whole. The poem is also pregnant with ideas ; there are references to the national and international political situations, wars, things of art and the prophetic statements about the advent of the barbaric, new age.

●

24

THE PITY OF LOVE

The Pity of Love again is a short poem. It was published in the volume of Yeats's poems entitled *The Rose.* Most of the poems of this volume are related to Yeats's disappointed, frustrated love, his desire to possess the unpossessable Maud Gonne. But some other poems also deal with the occult and Irish themes.

Yeats's craftsmanship in *The Rose* is more confident and fully co-ordinated than in his earlier writing. Another poem, similar to that of *The Pity of Love*, is *The Sorrow of Love* in the same volume, in which the girl (the beloved) is seen in more tragic perspective :

"A girl arose that had red mournful lips
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers ;
Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,
And all that lamentation of the leaves,
Could but compose man's image and his cry."

And so is the tone in another poem of this volume. The contours of Yeats's mind in this particular phase are drawn with some justice in *The White Birds :*

"I am haunted by numberless islands,
    and many a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and
    sorrow come near us no more ;
Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of
    the flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved,
    buoyed out on the foam of the sea !"

In *A Cradle Song*, Yeats voiced :

"I sigh that kiss you,
For I must own
That I shall miss you
When you have grown."

The poems included in *The Rose* (1892) "deal with his frustrated love for Maud Gonne, the Rosicrucian and Cabbalistic doctrine he was learning in the Order of the Golden Dawn and which he drew on for both rose and tree symbolism, and those legends of ancient pre-Christian Ireland which focused on Cuchulain, the heroic fighter and lover ; Fergus, the king who—in Yeats's version—abandoned his kingdom to become a poet of a Druidical wisdom ; and Conchubar, the crafty Red Branch King of kings who, possessing all things, could not win love."

The central theme of *The Pity of Love* is love. The poem was written by Yeats, as he wanted to present it to his beloved, Maud Gonne. Yeats feels that his beloved is being threatened by the merchants, the people 'who are buying and selling', clouds, cold wind, water. A few more poems also deal with threat to his love.

25

POLITICS

Introduction

This short poem of twelve lines was penned by Yeats a few years before his death and was published in the *Last Poems and Plays*. Unterecker outlines the details of its creation in this way: "Once recalled 'the Theme' and written as an 'answer' to an article about Yeats which had appeared in the *Yale Review* and which had praised the 'public' language but implied that he should use it on political subjects, the poem, he assured Dorothy Wellesley, is not based on 'a real incident, but a moment of meditation'." It is a blunt and forthright statement of the poet's zest for life as well as a sigh for vanished youth and physical powers.

The poet stresses the point that the source of the artistic creation is the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart. The poetic creation is in fact rooted in the junk-shop grave—a place where rags are sold, and bones of man's heart are also auctioned.

The poet is growing old. Physically he is decayed and broken down. But he is still a "foolish old man," he has still an old man's "eagle mind". He is still so foolish and passionate that the sight of a young and beautiful girl carries him off his feet. He can no longer concentrate on weighty matters that might be under discussion at the time. He cannot fix his attention on Russian, Roman or Spanish politics. They might be talking of the possibilities of the outbreak of the Second World War and the havoc it was likely to cause. But all these weighty matters no longer have the physical power to enjoy the beautiful girl standing there. Growing old is a curse, for it is no longer possible for a person, even for "a foolish, passionate old man" like the poet, to enjoy the good things of life.

The Last Poems and Plays have been criticized for their sexuality, violence and brutality. Yeats has been accused of grovelling in lust, blood and mire in these poems. Poems, like the one under review, certainly, seem to bear out the charge on a superficial reading. But the truth is otherwise. The poem is not an expression of lust and sexuality; it is rather an expression of his sense of the tragedy of human life. Tragedy, says F. L. Lucas, "is man's answer to the universe which crushes him so pitilessly," and it is this tragic fact which is expressed by this fine lyric. The poem, in brief, is an expression of Yeats's sensitiveness to the inadequacies of life, and its apparent gaiety, "is not only ironical but also intensely tragic."

26

A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

Introduction

The years around the First World War were a period of trouble and insecurity for Yeats. He was worried and unhappy. While the War was being fought and won, Yeats had been making his soul and deciding to get a 'comfortable wife and house'. This he did in 1917. There were some other events to which he could not shut his eyes. Among these the Dublin Rebellion had a strong hold on him. In the presence of heroic action of the Irish patriots, the poet would not remain dumb ; he took upon himself to celebrate those who had given a blow to liberty. The times were out of joint, and in terms of his philosophy of history, a new age in the world's history was going to begin.

By 1919, the War was over, but in Ireland things were far from peaceful. Old sense of values was fast disappearing, law and order were things of the past. Amidst all the public wrongs, Yeats had also some personal difficulties. His daughter, the eldest child, Annie Butler Yeats, was born on February 26, 1919. Yeats wrote this poem after her birth. Just a month before, he had written the poem entitled *The Second Coming*. The poet had purchased the old tower or castle at Thoor Ballylee, renovated it, and settled there soon after his marriage. This tower forms the background to this poem.

A Prayer for My Daughter was written in February-June, 1919, and it appeared in the volume entitled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). It runs into ten stanzas, and each stanza contains eight lines. The stanza form is the same as that of *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*. But the poem should be read along with *The Second Coming*, because there is some similarity between the two poems. The poet is anxious to rescue his daughter from the wrath and tyranny of *The Second Coming*, the poem which suggests the end of the Christian era and the advent of a new barbaric age. The poet foresees the end of the present civilization which is "scientific, democratic, fact accumulating, heterogeneous civilization", for in it there is anarchy and lawlessness. So the poet wants to save his daughter from many an evil of the present civilization. The poet is gloomy and anxious to protect his child from the wrath of the coming cruel tides ; he prays to solicit for her infant child a life of beauty and innocence, of safety and security, without the cursed intellectual hatred and opinionated stubbornness. He does not want her to grow like Helen who was troubled by a fool, or, like Venus who married the lame ironsmith of the gods, Hephaestus, or Maud Gonne who married a fool, a lout named MacBride.

Stanza 1

Word-meanings and Notes

Once more......the child sleeps on—while the storm is raging, the baby is sleeping well in the cradle under a cover.

Gregory's wood—the wood surrounding Lady Gregory's (Lady Augustus Gregory's) house at Coole Park in County Galway, where the poet had passed many a beautiful summer. Yeats was very much interested in a 'personal landscape' having a certain imaginative order. "On the map, this country is not so much the Sligo of his youth, Lough Gill, Ben Bulben, and the other shore of Roses, as the countryside south of Galway—Thoor Ballylee, Coole Park, and the stony lands on the borders of Clare. This is the landscape of (the poems) *A Memory of Major Robert Gregory*, *A Prayer for my Daughter*, *Meditations in Time of Civil War*, and many other major poems. It is a landscape which is granted its own solid identity—it is not ridiculous to go on pilgrimages there, if only to see how closely Yeats's descriptions correspond to the facts—but at the same time we see the poet's mind constantly at work upon it transforming into emblem. The process turns each poem of this kind into an articulated meditation in which the identity of things is constantly being raised to a new power by a reverence both for what the mind makes of things and for what they are."—(Peter Ure, *Yeats*, pp. 61-62).

Lady Gregory—Lady Augustus Gregory, friend and patroness of the poet at whose residence Yeats had spent many a pleasant summer.

Haystack—regular pile of hay with pointed or ridged top.

The haystack......wind—the wind so violent that it levels down roofs and haystacks

Bred on the Atlantic—originated from the Atlantic Ocean.

The great gloom that is in my mind—deep despondency about the future of the civilization that is verging on destruction.

Paraphrase

The poet's infant daughter sleeps in its cradle well covered and protected from the violent storm which rages outside. The stormy wind comes direct from the Atlantic, opposed only by the wood of Lady Gregory's estate and one bare hill. A storm also rages within the soul of the poet. He is full of despondent foreboding for the future of humanity. He has walked about anxiously a great deal and prayed for his daughter.

Stanza 2

Word-meanings and Notes

Scream—this word is used deliberately to suggest hysteria.

Tower—the residence of the poet.

Elms—a variety of trees.

The flooded stream—the image evokes to our memory the Great Flood mentioned in the Bible. It also suggests the forth-coming disaster of human civilization described by the poet in his *Vision.*

N. B.—Mark the imagery. The innocence of the sea is 'murderous'. Also mark the paradox. This stanza gives the reason for the poet's gloom. In the dream, the future years have come in and the father fears the future (most fathers do so when they think of their children and the poet is only showing his natural piety in his worry). The principle of contraries is involved in 'murderous' and 'innocence'.

Paraphrase

The sea-wind screams upon the tower, below the arches of the bridge connecting the castle with the main road, and in the elms above the flooded river. The poet's mind is haunted with fear, and he imagines that the future years have come out of the sea, dancing the frenzied dance of war and bloodshed. So like an affectionate father he prays for his daughter.

Stanza 3

Word-meanings and Notes

Distraught—distracted ; perplexed ; frantic.

Heart-revealing intimacy—sincere love.

Never find a friend—never find a good husband.

Paraphrase

The poet prays that his daughter should be gifted with beauty, but not so much beauty as to make her proud and cruel.. Women gifted with extraordinary beauty begin to regard beauty as a complete end in itself and forget that beauty should be conducive to the happiness of life. Proud of their beauty, they forget their natural kindness, fail to respond to the advances of even sincere lovers, and so ultimately fail to find a suitable life-companion. (The reference is towards Maud Gonne who was a bewitching beauty, rejected Yeats's proposal of marriage and married a lout, MacBride).

Stanza 4

Word-meanings and Notes

Helen—daughter of Zeus and Leda, and the most beautiful of women. She was carried off when still a child by Theseus, but recovered by her brothers. She was wooed by the principal Chiefs in Greece, who at the suggestion of Odysseus agreed to abide by her choice and defend her husband. She was married to Menelaus, but carried away by Paris to Troy in the absence of her husband. The Greek Princes led by Agamemnon undertook the expedition to Troy to recover her, and after a siege of ten years took the city. Helen was, thus, reconciled to Menelaus, and after her return lived with him at Sparta.

From a fool—from Paris, the prince of Troy, who eloped with Helen.

And later had......fool—the reference is to Prince Paris of Troy with whom Helen eloped, an event which became the cause of the destruction of Troy.

That great Queen, that rose out of the spray—Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love identified by the Romans with Venus. According to Heroid, she sprang from the foam of the sea, floating on a lotus, hence, 'that rose out of the spray'. She was married to Hephaestus, the lame ironsmith of the gods. But she was unfaithful to him ; her amorous intrigue with Ares was discovered, and the pair was caught in a net by Hephaestus and exposed to the ridicule of the assembled gods.

While that great Queen .....smith for man—Yeats's own beloved Maud Gonne married the lout, MacBride, just as Aphrodite married the lame Hephaestus,

It's certain......their meat—the poet believes that beautiful women eat something silly which makes them crazy and mad.

The Horn of Plenty—the bestower of gifts. In Greek mythology, the horn of the goat that suckled Jupiter. It was placed among the stars as a symbol of plenty and prosperity.

The Horn of...... undone—their happiness is ruined.

Paraphrase

Beautiful women certainly eat something unusual, which makes them proud and mad and miserable. Most of the beautiful women had been the cause of their unhappiness, and have behaved foolishly. Helen caused much trouble to Paris, Aphrodite (Venus) committed the folly of marrying the lame ironsmith of God (Hepaestus) and betrayed him, and Maud Gonne married foolishly a lout, MacBride, and could not live happily with him and sought separation from him.

Stanza 5

Word-meanings and Notes

Roved—roamed.

N. B.—The whole paragraph is devoted to 'courtesy', to which the poet attached great importance.

Chiefly learned—especially equipped.

Hearts are not......earned—hearts are not bestowed as a gift for nothing ; they have to be captured by courteous behaviour.

That have played the fool—the allusion is to poet's love for Maud Gonne on account of her extraordinary beauty. It was foolish on his part to be keen to possess her.

Has charm made wise—people who have been mad after beauty have at last attained wisdom and have corrected themselves. An autobiographical touch ; the reference is to himself.

Loved.....beloved—the poet loved Maud Gonne and thought that he was being loved in return.

From a glad kindness......his eyes—cannot but be attracted and captivated by kind courtesy.

Paraphrase

The poet prays for his daughter so that she may have not bewitching beauty (for most beautiful women have been miserable as well as the cause of misery), but she must have virtues like courtesy. Courtesy is an aristocratic virtue which the poet values highly. It is courtesy which enables to win the hearts of people permanently. The poet reflects on the wisdom and maturity which his marriage with an average Mrs. Georgie Lees has brought him. Though she was not beautiful, yet she won Yeats's heart. Like many others the poet also acted like a fool for the sake of a betwitching beauty, *i. e.*, Maud Gonne. He thought that he loved her and she loved him too. But he was in the wrong. Beautiful women hardly have any heart. Ultimately it was not beauty but courtesy that won his heart.

Stanza 6

Word-meanings and Notes

Flourishing hidden tree—inner self-flourishing like a tree and attaining self-fulfilment.

Linnet—a common brown or grey song-bird.

That all her thoughts......linnet be—her inner life should be rich with thoughts happy and innocent like the linnet, the song-bird. The linnets are happy themselves, and they make others happy and cheerful by their sweet songs. Likewise his daughter should be herself happy and cheerful and inject her happiness into others.

Magnanimities of sound—delightful and sweet musical sounds uttered by the linnets It is an expression which is almost Shakepearean in felicity.

Rooted in......place – she should have a fixed place to live in and should also firmly lead a life in conformity with tradition.

Paraphrase

The poet prays that the soul, the inner life, of his daughter should flourish and reach self-fulfilment, like a flourishing tree. Round this inner life should cluster thoughts, happy and innocent, like the linnets. The linnets are symbols of innocence and cheerfulness. The linnets are happy themselves and make others happy by their songs. So his daughter should be happy within and should infuse that happiness among others.

The tree not only symbolizes inner life, but also stands for constancy in place and the life of tradition. The poet considers a life rooted in tradition to be a happy life, and so wishes that his daughter's life should be rooted in one place and tradition, like a laurel tree. Such a fixity in place and tradition would result in the maximum of happiness for her.

Stanza 7

Word-meanings and Notes

Because the minds......prosper but little—because the sorts of beauty and minds, such as, possessed by Maud Gonne do not do well in life due to hatred which they harbour.

My mind......has dried up—my mind has lost its balance because of the hatred, barrenness and dryness of the minds of the beautiful ones I have come in contact with.

Assault and battery of the wind—blows of misfortune.

Explanation

The poet looks into himself and feels that he has developed too much of hatred. In a good mind, hatred must not be, and so he prays that his daughter should have as little hatred as possible.

Paraphrase

The poet looks into his own mind and heart, and finds—such have been the experiences of his life, and such was the beauty he loved—hatred within himself. He regards hatred as the worst of all evils, and prays that his daughter should be free from that evil. If there is no hatred in the soul, no buffets of misfortune can ruin the innocence and cheerfulness of a person.

Stanza 8

Word-meanings and Notes

So let her think opinions and accursed—Yeats disliked women's having strong opinions. It was an old complaint about Maud. Compare a passage in Diary 1910 :

> "I fear for her any renewed devotion to any opinion. Women, because the main event of their lives has been a giving of themselves, give themselves to an opinion as if it were a stone doll—women should have their play with dolls, finished in childhood, for if they play with ideas again it is amid hatred and malice."

The idea that too much beauty brought bad luck was an intermittent one, varying according to Yeats's moods. Compare a line in *Deirdre* ("Plays in Prose and Verse"), p. 192 :

> "But that she'd too much beauty for good luck."

The loveliest women born—the allusion is to Maud Gonne, an extraordinary beauty whom Yeats loved with all his heart and soul, but who spurned his love because of her obstinacy of views.

Out of the mouth......plenty's horn—born with a silver spoon in her mouth, Maud Gonne was born in an aristocratic family.

Opinionated mind—mind full of strongly held political opinions.

Bellows—roars ; shouts.

An old bellows......angry wind—reference is to John MacBride whom Maud Gonne married. Yeats elsewhere calls him "a drunken vainglorious lout."

Paraphrase

The poet wishes that his daughter should avoid the weaknesses of Maud Gonne. Intellectual hatred is the worst of faults and the worst kind of hatred, and so he would like his daughter to have no strong, stubborn opinions—political or of any other type. It was because of her strongly held opinions that Maud Gonne acted so foolishly. She was so beautiful and so well-born, and yet she ruined her happiness and her chances in life by marrying John MacBride, a worthless, "vainglorious lout".

Stanza 9

Word-meanings and Notes

Radical—original ; fundamental, also natural.

Self-delighting...self-affrighting—the soul can feel delighted within itself and have the strength and resolution to ward off evil and sorrow from it. Influence of Indian thought can easily be seen in these lines.

And every windy...burst—the blowing of the wind and the bursting of the bellows means the blows of misfortune and bad luck.

Explanation

Since the worst of hatreds is intellectual hatred (*e. g.*, the hatred of the communist for the capitalist and *vice versa*), the poet would like his daughter to have no strongly held opinions that Maud Gonne had, although Maud was so beautiful and well-born, and was married to a poor man. Hence, he would prefer his daughter to be free from fanaticism of the intellect. If she can be free from this opinionatedness, she can be radically innocent and will be "self-delighting, self-appeasing, self-affrighting", and shall be ever happy.

Paraphrase

If my daughter is free from all intellectual hatred, she would enjoy an organic innocence, an inner peace, her soul finding its fulfilment, within itself and not in working, like Maud Gonne, on the happiness of others. Her own will and pleasure shall be expressive of the will of Heaven. She would then be happy despite all the storms of misfortune that may strike against her innocent head, and the hostility of the world.

Stanza 10

Word-meanings and Notes

Accustomed—traditional.

Peddled in the thoroughfares—found among people of ordinary status and calibre, the common masses.

Ceremony—the word 'ceremonious' and 'ceremony' used by Yeats are significant. They stand for a way of life based on spiritual values which are noble and higher than the common ones. Such a way of life alone breeds innocence and happiness. Yeats holds aristocracy higher, and treats aristocracy as a synonym to the traditional and ceremonious way. He believes, if his daughter is married to an aristocrat and lives a life of traditional culture which stresses highly on the spiritual values, she would be happy for ever.

Paraphrase

In the last stanza, the poet prays that his daughter be married to a good, aristocratic bridegroom who would take her to a well-appointed home, where life is aristocratically ceremonious. Neither arrogance nor hatred should be seen in that house, for only in the atmosphere of custom and ceremony can innocence and real beauty be born. Moreover, arrogance and hatred are found in the common streets; the aristocractic way of life is rooted in custom and tradition. Ceremony and tradition preserve culture which preserves spiritual values.

A Critical Appreciation of 'A Prayer for My Daughter'

A Prayer for My Daughter was written in February-June, 1919, soon after the birth of Yeats's eldest child, Annie Butler Yeats, on February 26, 1919, and was published in the volume entitled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). It runs into ten stanzas, and each stanza contains eight lines. The stanza form is the same as that of *In Memory of Major Gregory*. The poem echoes the mood of a former poem, *The Second Coming*, which was written only a month before this poem, and in which the poet had made a prophecy :

> "Things fall apart ; the centre cannot hold ;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned."

This threatening background accounts for the poet's gloom mentioned in the first stanza of the poem. Dr. B. Rajan pertinently remarks, "Yeats's prayer for his daughter gains in strength against the threatening background which makes the appeal to custom and ceremony something more than mere nostalgia for an aristocratic past." There is a "great gloom in the poet's mind," and an "excited reverie" caused by the sad aftermath of the First World War, the fire of the Dublin Rebellion, and the emergence of a new age. Amidst the public wrongs, Yeats had also some personal difficulties. Fatherhood made him gentle, but it could not lessen his worries for the new-born child in a world of increasing anarchy. Hence, the poet is naturally gloomy, and the poem opens with the image of his child sleeping innocently through a howling storm, and the poet wishing and praying for the safety, protection and the best settlement in life for her. The problem before him is how to protect his daughter from the wrath of the coming cruel tides of time which would bring a ruin upon civilization :

> "Imagining in excited reverie
> That the future years had come,
> Dancing to a frenzied drum,
> Out of the murderous innocence of the sea"

Visions of some approaching catastrophe possess him and fill his mind with gloomy forebodings. This storm within his soul finds its symbol in the storm which rages outside. The wind, "Atlantic bred," screams hysterically above "the flooded stream" reminding one of the Great Biblical Blood, and of the imminent inundation. The sense of the disturbance in nature, and of the destructive possibilities of the storm howling outside, is intensified by contrast with the cosy, peaceful picture of the infant sleeping comfortably, undisturbed, either by the storm in nature or the sombre auguries of the poet-father.

Full of gloom and apprehension, the poet has walked about restlessly for an hour, and now he prays for the future well-being and happiness of his darling child. He wishes that she should have beauty which makes women vain and cruel, and which makes women vain and cruel, and which makes them unappreciative even of sincere and true love. Such excessive beauty drives them crazy and results in unhappiness for them, and for those who come in contact with them. This prayer draws its force and significance from the personal experiences of the poet. Maud Gonne had such "over-much" beauty, and the result was that she made him unhappy by rejecting his sincere and faithful love and devotion, and then ruined her own life by foolishly marrying the unworthy John MacBride.

It is certain that beautiful women eat some such food which makes them crazy and ruins their happiness and peace. The poet supports his argument by citing instances from history and legendry. Helen eloped with Paris and caused the destruction of Troy. Venus also foolishly enough married Hephaestus, the lame ironsmith of the gods, and then betrayed him. Hence, the poet prays for his daughter :

> "May she be granted beauty and yet not
> Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught."

The poet attaches great value to courtesy, and wishes that his daughter should grow up chiefly learned in courtesy. It is courtesy which enables even those who are not "entirely beautiful" to win the hearts of others. Many a fool who had wandered foolishly in pursuit of extreme beauty has been won over by courtesy and made wise and sensible. The poet himself was won over by the courtesy of his present wife, and is now living with her a life of ease and contentment. Courtesy, therefore, is to be preferred to the perfection of physical charms :

> "Hearts are not had as gift but hearts are earned
> By those that are not entirely beautiful."

The poet further prays that the soul of his daughter may grow and reach 'self-fulfilment' like a 'flourishing tree'. May cheerful and innocent thoughts cluster round her soul, as do linnets round a tree, and may she, like the song-birds, spread sweetness, music and melody all round. May she herself be happy and contented and be a source of happiness for others. Her loves and her quarrels should all begin and end in gaiety. She should grow rooted in one place like a "green laurel tree".

> "May she become a flourishing hidden tree
> That all her thoughts may like the linnet be
>
> × × ×
>
> O may she live like some green laurel
> Rooted in one dear perpetual place."

The poet peeps into himself and finds hatred reposing there. The poet thinks that hatred is the murderer of innocence and wishes that his daughter should be free from this monster, hatred, for he fully knows that the intellectual hatred is the worst of all hatreds. It was because of the 'opinionated mind', her strongly-held opinions that Maud Gonne married MacBride and thus ruined her happiness as well as the poet's. If his daughter remains free from all hatred, her soul will be self-contained, self-satisfied and self-delighted. So he prays :

> "An intellectual hatred is the worst
> So let her think opinions are accursed
> Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
> Out of the mouth of plenty's horn,
> Because of her opinionated mind
> Barter that horn and every good
> By quiet nature understood
> For an old bellows full of angry wind ?"

The last stanza vividly brings out the poet's aristocratic bias. His disillusionment with the Irish masses, coupled with the kindness and sympathy he received from Lady Gregory, had made Yeats an enthusiastic admirer of the "big-house tradition". He regarded the aristocracy as the guardian of the traditional culture and way of life, and of the highest spiritual values. He, therefore, wishes for his daughter an aristocratic husband who would take her to a home where life is traditional and customary. Such a life alone is conducive to beauty and innocence, while the life of the common man, without its roots in tradition, is a life of hatred and arrogance :

> "How but in custom and in ceremony
> Are innocence and beauty born ?
> Ceremony's a name for the rich born,
> And custom for the spreading laurel tree."

Thus, the poet has fashioned an ideal of aristocratic life and would like his daughter to have it. "This ideal is not like Polonius like *ex cathedra* statement. His is a leisurely, well-reasoned ideal, based not only on mythology and history but also on his own experience of men and women. Its homely tone and air of intimacy gives it great appeal." The poem strikes the note of optimism. He thinks that though 'every windy quarter howl or every bellows burst', men and women can remain innocent if they destroy the seeds of hatred from their hearts, and cultivate the state of grace. The poet stands for "an essentially non-Christian order, whose key-note is man's sense of his own nobility and self-sufficiency."—(Wilson).

This poem is a landmark in the voyage of the poet. In the previous volume of his poems, *Responsibilities*, there were the rages of the cold winter. Now begins the reblossoming of his poetry. He has left sentiments and pathos far behind and has developed the tragic sense. He can now write with authority, and can blend his appreciation of beauty with a sense of the tragic rather than the pathetic element of life. He can now give significance to the ordinary events of life which his earlier poetry avoided. He attains in the process a personal means of achieving public speech in poetry.

Mr. Jeffares points out that the poem has wonderful flexibility. "This poem shows the flexibility he was achieving. It can move through description of the place we are beginning to recognize, the tower ; it can freely describe the poet's mood of gloom and then move to the idea of beauty in women, from there to symbols of great love found disappointing, to Helen, Aphrodite and by implication Maud Gonne."—(Jeffares A. Norman, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, p. 41).

The poem is adorned with a wealth of phrases and images that are suggestive and evocative. Much is implied and more is meant than strikes the ear. The poem is an amalgam of symbols, its richness of texture is remarkable, and its easy flow of ideas, more subtly linked than may at first appear, is a result of Yeats's increasing ability to make his concepts cohere. The 'storm' howling symbolizes destruction and recalls the 'mere anarchy' of *The Second Coming*. The flooded stream also recalls the havoc to be wrought in *The Second Coming*. The 'murderous innocence of the sea' recalls the images of 'blood-dimmed tide' and the violence of the *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*. The 'bandy-legged Smith' is MacBride and Helen is Maud Gonne by implication. Yeats has Maud Gonne in his mind when he says that "It's certain that fine women eat a crazy salad." The 'rich horn of plenty' is suggestive of courtesy, aristocracy, and ceremony. The 'hidden laurel tree' can provide through custom the innocence of the soul. So the images follow one after another. The images of Helen evoke another figure—Aphrodite—who rose out of a sea-spray. The union of Aphrodite with Hephaestus brings to our mind the Maud Gonne-MacBride episode. Thus, the whole cluster of images becomes complex.

Unterecker has remarked that there are two images which are basic to the poem, "Yeats focuses his poem on two images : the rich born of plenty which he associates with courtesy, aristocracy and ceremony ; and the hidden laurel tree which 'rooted in one dear perpetual place' can provide through custom a radical innocence for the soul. If through custom the innocence can be recovered, though 'every windy quarter howl or every bellow burst' to be happy in spite of the world which surrounds her."—Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to Yeats*, p. 167).

"Written in the same stanza as *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*, the poem is consciously and deceptively discursive. The conversational tone and the apparent meandering are meant to give authenticity to the prayer, to the stream of hope and anxiety in the poet's mind. Nevertheless, as the poem proceeds, its chosen symbols gather weight and meaning and the last stanza knits them into a fully controlled order. Thus, the wind bred from the sea's murderous innocence changes startlingly but convincingly into the wind of intellectual hatred. It emanates from an old bellows, exchanged for the horn of plenty, by a member of that class of opinionated idealists whose destiny is to climb upon waggonettes to scream. It batters not only Gregory's hidden wood but the flourishing tree which Yeats visualizes as the ideal images of his daughter's future. The tree, in turn, is a tree of self-fulfilment, of inner life around which thoughts cluster like linnets. But it also comes to stand for constancy and for the life of tradition ; it is

'......Like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.'

The innocence achieved when the wind had failed to tear the linnet from the leaf is 'radical as opposed to 'murderous' innocence. It is self-contained, organic, expressive of the will of Heaven, finding its fulfilment in itself and not in working on the happiness of others. The last four lines of the poem confirm and make explicit the evolving design :

"How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born ?
Ceremony's a name for the rich born,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree."

—Dr. B. Rajan, *W. B. Yeats : A Critical Introduction*).

However, the poem, *A Prayer for my Daughter* has been criticized on grounds of snobbery and triviality, for the poet has not laid down or desired for daughter a way of life consistent with the highest religious or moral ideals. He has not prayed for any Christian virtues for her. Stephen Spender, criticizing the poem, writes : "Reverent as he is, he does not convey any religion ; instead, we are offered, in such poems as *A Prayer for my Daughter*, an aristocratic faith." But all such criticism is beside the mark. Arnold Usher in *Three Irishmen* defends the poem and says that the poem has a ring of optimism about it in thinking that 'mere anarchy' cannot harm the child if she is innocent and is in custom and ceremony bred. As Edmund Wilson observes, "The poet has formulated an essentially non-Christian order, whose key-note is a man's sense of his own nobility and self-sufficiency." The fact is that the poet has left sentiments and pathos far behind and has developed the tragic sense with authority, he has cultivated the sense of realizing what real beauty is. The poem preaches a gospel for Beauty which is 'good', which is a synonym of courtesy and innocence.

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THE ROSE OF THE WORLD

Introduction

The second volume of Yeats's poems was entitled *The Rose*. It appeared in the year 1893. This poem, *The Rose of the World* occurs in this volume. In 1887, Yeats was initiated into the society of 'The Hermetic students' founded by Liddell Mathers. Mathers evoked Yeats's interest in certain symbols and used cardboard to arouse them. Mathers' order was known as the order of the Golden Dawn or the "Order of the Rose". Its hierarchical system was based on Rosicrucianism. Under the influence of the "Order of the Rose", Yeats became almost a magician, and his processes of thought and feeling strongly savoured of its strange ritual right up to the first decade of the twentieth century. That is why his poetry of the first phase of his career is dominated by the image of the Rose as a symbol of Divine Wisdom. In prose also he wrote *The Secret Rose Stories* (*1897*) and *Rose Alchemica*. The first of the poems to take of the poet's new enthusiasm was *Rose* which opened his volume of that name in 1893. In this poem, which is in the nature of a prayer, the poet invokes its help to help him see—

> "In all poor foolish things that live a day,
> Eternal beauty wandering on her way."

The poet longs to see the workings of the Rose in the legends of Celtic mythology. In particular, he would like to see its hand in the Cuchulain legend and the religious rites of the Druids. Cuchulain was the legendary hero of Ulster ; he was very handsome and possessed prodigious strength. In one of his famous exploits, he defended Ulster against the armies of the rest of Ireland. The Protestants liked Cuchulain to see as the first patriot of Ireland. Yeats himself came of a Protestant family, so he was naturally susceptible to its attractions as a myth. The Druids were an organized priesthood of the Celtic race. Yeats believed these myths and legends to be the rock, the racial unconscious as if it were, on which genuine art should be based. As he himself observes: "Folk-art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and the pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great is rooted. Wherever it is spoken by the fireside, or sung by the roadside, or carved upon the lintel, appreciation of the arts that a single mind gives unity and design to, spreads quickly when its hour is come."—(*The Celtic Twilight*). *The Rose of the World* is the fruition of such thoughts of Yeats.

Jeffares tells us that the poem originated when Yeats and Maud Gonne were resting after a walk on the cliffs at Howth. Two sea-gulls flew over their heads and out to sea and Maud Gonne observed that if she were to have the choice of being any bird she would choose to be a sea-gull. Three days later Yeats sent her the poem.

Word-Meanings and Notes

For these red lips—the lips of Maud Gonne.

Mournful—sad ; tired.

Betide—come ; to befall.

Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam—it was Helen's beauty which brought destruction to Troy. Yeats compares Maud Gonne's beauty with that of Helen, and does not know what calamity such a bewitching beauty may bring.

Usna's children—Deirdre was another great beauty in the Celtic tradition. It was for her beauty's sake that Usna's three children died.

Paraphrase

The Rose of the World was written because Maud Gonne was tired after a long walk. The poet starts with a question "who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream ?" That is, the effect of beauty is enchanting like magic. It was for the red lips, for the beauty of Helen that Troy was destroyed, the topless towers of Ilium were burnt. It was for Deirdre's beauty's sake that three sons of Usna(Usnach) had to die. So one does not know what doom Maud Gonne's pensive beauty may bring ! (She was pensive because she was consciously sharing the sadness of her fallen motherland).

We are all in this labouring mortal world, passing through amid men's souls which waver like the pale waters in their wintry race on this lonely face of the Beauty (Maud Gonne).

N.B.—The philosophy of the "Order of the Rose" has been brought in. The aim of this order was to help its members to open their minds to an awareness of other levels of consciousness. In this Order the universe was considered to be a series of emanations from an ineffable, boundless source. There was emphasis on the purification of self in occultism. Another influence is that of the Theosophists who believed in the Omnipresent and the Eternal principle, the conflict of the opposites in the world, and the identity of all souls with the Universal.

Maud, tired after a long walk, sat on the grass to rest, and Yeats asks the archangels, the highest angels to bow down before this great beauty. They might be the ones who have been first to seat themselves by the side of the creator, or any others. But he did not subject the world to them as he had subjected to this beauty, for he had made the world to be a grassy road before her wandering road. Beauty is the primary aspect of God.

A Critical Appreciation of the Poem

The Rose of the World is one of the Rose poems published in the volume entitled *The Rose* which appeared in 1893. In these Rose poems, Yeats uses the rose as the symbol of wisdom. "In 'The Rose of the World' Yeats has followed Cuchulain poems. For Helen, Cuchulain's female counterpart from a different mythology, like him bird begotten, half-mortal and half-goddess, the fatal woman whose great beauty led to the destruction of Troy, is Ideal Woman just as Cuchulain is Ideal Man. Yeats, linking Maud Gonne's "red lips" with Helen and the figure from Irish mythology who most closely corresponds to Helen, Deirdre for the sake of whom Usna's children died speculates about the function of Beauty and concludes as other Cabbalists before him, that it is primary aspect of God." So Yeats introduces occultism into his poem.

Jeffares tells us that the poem originated when Yeats and Maud Gonne were resting after a walk on the cliffs at Howth. Two sea-gulls flew over their heads and out to sea and Maud Gonne observed (not very originally) that if she were to have the choice of being any bird she would choose to be a sea-gull. Three days later Yeats sent her the poem.

The theme of the poem is about the function of beauty. What a great doom beauties have brought to the world, *e. g.*, Helen and Deirdre ! Who knows what doom this bewitching beauty Maud Gonne may bring ? God has given supreme position to Beauty, even higher to that of the archangels who are made to bow before Beauty, for beauty is the primary aspect of God.

When Yeats wrote this poem, Yeats was developing a rhetorical manner and a challenging tone. He had been taking part in patriotically regenerating his country, and was under the fascination of Maud Gonne's bewitching beauty. This double affection for rhetoric and beauty—gets fused with his devotion to the mystical order of the rose in his *The Rose of the World*. It opens with a bang.

> "Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream ?"

Robert Graves cells it a poem of Yeats's 'copper period' meaning thereby, that its glitter is really not that of gold.

To quote Dr. B. Rajan, "Yeats's craftsmanship in *The Rose* is more confident and more fully co-ordinated than in his earlier writing. A poem such as *The Rose of the World* invites appreciation by its merging of two traditions in the Helen-Deirdre image, by the manner in which the double use of 'dream' helps to give weight to the rhetoric of the first line, and by the manner in which the lingering stresses of the fourth line prolong the funeral gleam of burning Troy......Sentimentality never far enough from the language, and even if one ignores the third stanza of *The Rose of the World* (written because Maud Gonne was tired after a long walk), there is significant loss of tension in the third line of the first stanza, where the betrayal of the heroic by the contemporary arouses no emotion beyond distant and abstract reproof."

The poem consists of three stanzas, each consisting of five lines, this fifth being, in each case, a half line, giving emphasis to the forceful voice. In the last two lines of the first stanza, the poet has given a wonderful evocation of two famous legends connected with the cult of beauty—the legend of Helen and the destruction she brought on Troy, and of Deirdre, the Celtic legendary beauty for whose beauty's sake three sons of Usna died. In the end, the children of Usna became permanent denizens of the reader's memory. "The last stanza makes the sad tragic beauty a type of the suffering Christ. In a way it is the poet's tribute to the pensive beauty of Maud Gonne, who was consciously sharing the sadness of her fallen motherland."

The rose of *The Rose of the World* has a complicated meaning. It symbolizes not only earthly and transient love, but also the eternal love and beauty. Speaking about the symbolism and the beauty of this poem, Richard Ellmann writes in *The Identity of Yeats* in the following manner :

"The present woman quickly becomes Helen of Troy (an insertion of Greek mythology which is unusual for Yeats in the nineties), then Deirdre, for whom the sons of Usna died, then beauty herself before God's throne, a conception familiar to Shelley and Spencer, and indebted to the cabbalistic and Neoplatonic theory that the *Shekinah* or eternal womanhood is coeval with God.

"Yeats either begins, then, with a symbolic abstraction and humanizes it, or begins with a woman and renders her symbolically impersonal. When she appears initially as a woman, she will, as likely as not, begin shortly to unfold as a multifoliate rose, to be sought unravellingly among mortal women. On the one hand when she is a rose at the beginning of a poem, she generally ends up with characteristics that have nothing to do with the flower. Some interpretation of the opposites qualifies the method a little ; the rose of the world is still 'weary and kind' in her exalted station next to God. But the basic pattern holds fairly firm.

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SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

Introduction

(a) *Date of Composition*—'Sailing to Byzantium' was composed on September 20, 1927, and was published in the volume of verses entitled *The Tower* (1928). It is the first poem of this volume.

(b) *What is Byzantium ?*—Byzantium and Constantinople were two adjacent towns that merged later into one city. In 1395, the Roman Empire was divided into two, and Byzantium became the capital of the Eastern Empire. It remained the capital of the Empire until the Turks captured it in 1453. "The historic Byzantium," says E. L. Black, "was remarkable for the skill of its craftsmen and the beauty of its buildings. But Yeats is writing about an ideal city ; Byzantium has become for him an Utopia, a symbol of holiness, of perfect craftsmanship, and of Ireland's future achievement in the arts : it is the world of intellect and spirit as distinct from the world of the senses."[1] "Nor is Byzantium the historical city ; the tourist is not invited to recall that here once he was overcharged, nor is the historian invited to contribute such information as that this was a city visited by Hugh of Vermandois ; Byzantium is not a place upon a map, but a term in the poem ; a term signifying a stage of contemplation wherein the soul studies itself and so learns both what it is and in what consists true and eternal joy."[2] Hence, Byzantium is "a symbol for the world of intellect and the spirit, as opposed to the world of senses......Yeats makes it a symbol of the life after death. As the point of fusion of two cultures, a theocratic community where the orient and the occident merged into one. Byzantium was a very apt symbol for the Platonic heaven, pure intellect where the opposites are reconciled."—(F. A. C. Wilson).

(c) *Yeats's Interest in Byzantium*—In the nineteenth century, the works and literature on the Byzantine art were brought out and Yeats visited the scholars and the friends who were acquainted with the history of Byzantium. There were English and French scholars who had manifested their interest in Byzantium culture. "In England, the circles which Yeats frequented were familiar with Byzantine art and specially with Ravenna. Burn Jones visited the town in 1873 to see its 'heavenly churches', and himself designed mosaics ; the revival of mosaic no less than cloisonne enamel with golden frames, another typically Byzantium mode of art, was part of the general 'revival' of the arts of design centring round Morris and his followers. F. G. Stephens lectured on Byzantine Art in Liverpool in 1878. Both Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symons visited and wrote about Revenna. Although Wilde's Revenna does not refer to the mosaics, elsewhere in a passage in *The Decay of Lying*, which he had read to Yeats on a memorable Christmas, he writes of Byzantine art in terms which closely approach Yeats's own later conception of it."[1] Some other scholars which became interested in Byzantium were J. B. Bury and O. M. Dalton who wrote respectively *History of the Later Roman Empire* (1889) and *Byzantium Art* (1911). Texier and Pullan studied the church architecture in 1864 and Lethady and Swainson brought out their study of Santa Sophia. Lindsay's *History of Christian Art* was also published in the nineteenth century. Another remarkable work was J. E. Neal's novel *The Fall of Constantinople* (1857).[2] Some of Yeats's friends had the knowledge of Ravenna. Yeats's friend, Arthur Symons, wrote *Cities of Italy* in 1907 in which he gave an account of Ravenna. In his *Cities* (1903), he describes Constantinople and Santa Sophia. Yeats in his '*Rosa Alchemica*' has described the mosaics of Ravenna.

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[1] E. L. Black, *Nine Modern Poets : An Anthology.*

[2] Elder Olson, "Sailing to Byzantium", *Prolegomena to a Poetics of the Lyric.*

Speaking about Yeats's interest in Byzantium, Curtis Bradford has observed : "The following books about Byzantium are in Yeats's library : O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* ; W. G. Holmes, *The Age of Justinian and Theodora*, Vol. I ; Mrs. Arthur Strong (trans. by Dalton and Braunholtz), Yeats annotated only the Holmes, and of Holmes only the first chapter, 'Constantinople in the Sixth Century,' an elaborate reconstructive description of Byzantium in Justinian's tune. Nearly every page of this chapter was marked. Yeats could not have derived his favourable opinion of Byzantine culture from Holmes, whose attitude toward his subject is both condescending and unfriendly. Yeats also collected reproductions of Byzantine mosaics."[3]

Byzantium was attractive to Yeats because of two reasons : (1) It was mathematically convenient, says John Unterecker, that the high point of Byzantine art should come almost a dead centre in the 2000 year cycle which, for him, defined beginning and end of modern times. (2) But Byzantium had for him greater attraction than convenience. A passage from *A Vision* defines the appeal that its brilliant integrated art made to him. Yeats also explains why he uses Byzantium as his symbol :

> "In the fifth century......Byzantium became Byzantine and substituted for formal Roman magnificence with its glorification of physical power, an architecture that suggests the sacred city in the Apocalypse of St. John. I think if I could be given a

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[1] D. J. Gordan & Fletcher *Byzantium*, p. 134.

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] Curtis Bradford, "Yeats's Byzantium Poems", *Twentieth Century Views*, p. 142.

> month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I choose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the academy of Plato. I think I could find in some little wine-shop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions, the supernatural descending nearer to him than to Plotinus even, for the pride of his delicate skill would make what was an instrument of power to princes and clerics, a murderous madness in the mob, show as a lovely flexible presence like that of perfect human body.
>
> "I think that in early Byzantium, may be never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic, and practical life were one ; that architects and artificers—though not, it may be, poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract......spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. They could copy out of old Gospel books those pictures that seemed as sacred as the text, and yet weave all into a vast design, the work of many that seemed the work of one, that made building picture, pattern, metal-work of rail and lamp, seem but a single image......"

Yeats had thorough familiarity with the Byzantine art and mosaics through his study of works and through his visit to Italy. He went to Italy with Lady Gregory and her son, and saw the mosaic at Ravenna in 1907. He praised the Italian paintings and was to visit Ravenna. Yeats's own comments and observations about his '*Sailing to Byzantium*' are both pertinent and significant.

> "Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called "Sailing to Byzantium." When Irish men were illuminating the Book of Kells and making the jewelled Croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European Civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city."[1]

This was what he said in a radio comment. In another comment on the Radio from London on July 3, 1937, Yeats refers to the golden tree 'with artificial birds' somewhere inside the Royal Palace of Byzantium. The birds sang. It became a symbol of the 'intellectual joy' of eternity in contra-distinction to the instinctive joy of human life. Then on April 30, 1930, he recorded in his diary : "Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millennium. A walking mummy. Flames at the street corners where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbour, offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them to the paradise."

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[1] See Curtis Bradford, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

(d) *Sources of His Philosophy in this Poem*—Yeats's reading in the 'twenties was varied. He had spent some of the Nobel Prize money on reference books for his library : *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the Cambridge Ancient. Medieval and Modern Histories, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Bryans' *Dictionary of Paintings*, and a number of works published in the nineteenth century on Byzantium and Byzantine (mentioned earlier in this discussion). In 1923, his letters to Mrs. Shakespeare make comments on Mrs. Strong's *Apotheosis* and *After-Life*. Binyon's *Blake*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*, Ossendwaski's *Beasts, Men and Gods*, etc. Most of the year 1924 had been occupied by the final work on the first edition of *A Vision*, but, this completed, he began to read philosophy.

He annotated Croce's *Philosophy of Vice* in this year. His health became troublesome and it was found that his blood pressure was too high, so in November, 1924, he and Mrs. Yeats went to Sicily, in February, 1925, to Capri and then to Rome, where he visited the Sistine Chapel and the Vatican galleries. He also read Baudelaire and Plotinus.

In July, 1925, he wrote in a letter :

"I am in better health than I was, and I do really believe that I owe it to Plotinus as much as the Tower."[1] In September, he was reading Croce's *Philosophy of the Practical*; and was out for full admiration of Croce.[2] It was against this background that Yeats wrote *Sailing to Byzantium* 'to recover' his 'spirits'. In the autumn, he was in London, and back in Dublin in October, he wrote to Mrs. Shakespeare that when he had gone to London he had just finished—

> "A poem in which I appeal to the Saints in 'the holy fire' to send death or their ecstasy.—In London I went to a medium called Cooper and......the medium gave me 'book of test'—third book from right bottom shelf study page 48 or 84—I have only this morning looked it up—the book was the complete Dante designs of Blake......Plate 84 is 'the Serpent attacking Vanni Fucchi......[3]

Yeats remained a symbolist in his later poetry, but he now moved to a far wider and deeper conception of symbolism, which was his interpretation of Platonic idealism, particularly in the form in which it was related by Berkeley. He now saw the whole material world as a symbolic dramatization of eternity, and he was free to choose his symbols from the whole range of his reading and personal experience. Two of the most impressive are Byzantium, the holy city, which is at once an idealized Ireland and a timeless paradise, and the image of himself as a terrible and dynamic old man for whom old age is not decrepitude but a spiritual adventure.

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[1] Letter to Mrs. Shakespeare from *Ballylee*, 2 July, 1926.

[2] Yeats wrote in a letter : "I read Croce and his like that I may at last make no concession to Darwinism—Croce because it is the opposite of his thought, in my ways clearer (clever ?) and so find a position—ageless energy or perception."—(Letter to Mrs. Shakespeare from *Thoor Ballylee*, 24 Sept., 1926).

[3] Letter from 82 Merrion Square, 27 October.

Stanza 1

Gist. The poet is not satisfied with the country in which he has been living and considers it to be unsuitable for old men. It is a country in which all are given to sensual pleasures, and art and philosophy, 'monuments of unageing intellect' are neglected.

Paraphrase

The poet faces the problem of old age, of death, and of regeneration, and gives his reason for the decision to go to his ideal city, Byzantium. Old age, he tells us, excludes a man from the sensual joys of youth ; this world, therefore, appears to belong completely to the young, it is no place for the old. The young are in each other's arms ; the birds are in the trees. The busy young people engrossed in joys of the senses neglect the world of art and philosophy. Hence, the old people should leave this world for another world of art and beauty, which may be symbolized in the concept of Byzantium.

Word-meanings and Notes

The young in......arms—the young men and women indulge themselves in amorous plays and pleasures. The occupation of the young is shrewdly stated ; at first sight human lovers have like the birds at their song, apparently a romantic and sentimental aura.

The poet feels that the young are given over to sensual delight, in which the old men can no longer participate. This is the world of chivalrous, gallant, adventurous young men, and the beautiful, fairy-like, vivacious, charming, dazzling damsels, blossoming like the fragrant roses, blooming in their youth and vigour, and bubbling with passion and emotions This is the twentieth century world of spider-women who attract men into their fold. It is the world where only the young can enjoy the honey of the sweet Eves ; old men are shut out from it.

Those dying generations—birds (symbolic of men) approaching old age. 'Generation' conveys the idea of reproductive process and sexual gratification among men and birds. As the young are embraced in one another's arms, the birds are sitting on the trees singing melodious songs. The birds are dying generations (so are human beings). Birth and death are compressed remarkably into 'dying generations'. The phrase recalls Yeats's *Ode to Grecian Urn* because of the unresolved conflict (though resolved in the realm of art) : "No hungry generations tread thee down."

Salmon-falls—waterfalls replete with shoals of Salmon (a variety of fish). The poet is thinking of Sligo. The river drops down through the town in a series of falls near which the Salmons leap in the spring when returning to spawn. Salmons are symbols of strength and beauty. Etymologically, 'salmons' are large, silver-scaled, pink-fleshed fish. The falls, in question, were those in Sligo where the poet had passed his childhood.

Mackerel—another variety of fish.

Fish, flesh or fowl – fish symbolizes all aquatic creatures, flesh alludes to human beings, and fowl, of course, means all feathery creation.

Commend—treat as worthy of acceptance ; recommend.

Begotten—sexually conceived and given birth to.

The salmon-falls......born and dies—intend the ascent of salmon to the head-waters, the descent of mackerel to the deep seas in the spawning season, and the ironic intention is clear ; all—the human lovers, the birds, the fish but spawn, but copulate, and this is their whole being ; and if the parallel statement does not make this sufficiently evident, the summation of all in terms meekly of animal genre—"fish, flesh, or fowl"—is unmistakable. The country of the young, then, is in its air, in its waters, and on its earth, from head-waters to ocean, wholly given over to sensuality ; its inhabitants "commend all summer long" anything whatsoever so long as it be mortal and animal – they 'commend' because they have great joy, that which they praise, they who praise, and their praise itself are ephemeral, for these mortals praise the things of mortality and their commendation, like their joy, lasts but a summer, a mating season.

Caught......intellect—these lines remove all ambiguity, and cancel all possibility of a return to such a country ; even if the old man could, he would not return to a land where—

> "Caught in that sensual music, all neglect
> Monuments of unageing intellect."

The young are 'caught', they are really passive and incapable of free action : and they neglect those things which are unageing.

The sensual music—sensual pleasures.

Monuments—memorials.

Monuments of unageing intellect—immortal products of the intellect and spirit as contrasted with *dying generations*, the result of sexual indulgence.

Commentary on Stanza 1

The poet is thinking of Sligo. The river drops down through the town in a series of falls up which the salmons leap in the spring when returning to spawn. Salmons are symbols of strength and beauty. The mackerel has special associations. The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas (seas full of fish), fish, flesh, and foul (symbols of strength in Irish mythology) all commend the temporary summer holiday. They commend their life-cycle and their death, the Spenserian mutabilities. Compare :

> "All that could run or leap or swim
> Whether in wood, water or cloud,
> Acclaiming, proclaiming, declaiming Him."

But their commendation like their joy lasts but a summer, a mating season, Man is 'Caught'—a key-word—as in a net of the sensual music. The concluding lines of the stanza cancel for the old men all possibilities of return. The young are caught up as surely as fish are caught up in a net. They are incapable of free action and ignore those things which are unageing, but for an old man there is nothing still but great achievements of the past, 'Monuments of unageing intellect'.

Stanza 2

Paraphrase

An old man, if his soul does not seek refuge in the domain of art and literature, deserves to be treated with contempt. The weaker he grows, the greater should be his devotion to art. He can only find delight and joy in the study of immortal works of art. Hence, he is going to Byzantium which is a country famous for its artistic wealth.

Word-meanings and Notes

A tattered coat upon a stick—a scarecrow ; an old man is as contemptible and helpless as a scarecrow. Mark the imagery ; it also reveals Yeats's frustration with old age.

Soul clap its hands and sing—the soul is thrilled with joy. The line recalls to mind Blake's vision of the soul clapping its hands and dancing. When Blake's brother died, Blake had a vision of his brother's soul going up to heaven and clapping its hands with joy. Thought is also reminiscent of Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. There is also a sneer for those who take poetry to be a mere singing as against deep thought.

Louder sing......dress—every step in the dissolution of the physical body should add further to the joy of the soul ; the more the tatters the louder the song.

Singing-school—a school where singing can be learned.

Monuments of its own magnificence—great works of art, the immortal products of the human soul.

The holy city—Byzantium is a holy city for the poet because it is a great centre of art and culture.

Explanation. In the second stanza the poet expresses his conviction that old age is very contemptible if the soul does not clap its hands and sing ; the weaker the old man is physically, the louder he should sing. An old man without deep and higher thought is always a subject of contempt. Hence, the older the man is, the more interested he should be in the artistic treasures of the human soul. As the poet is now becoming old and weak, he has decided to go to

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the city of Byzantium in order to devote himself to the study and understanding of the artistic treasures of the world. Elder Olson writes, "As the second stanza expounds, old age itself is no solution ; the old man cannot justly say, like Sophocles, when he was asked whether he regretted the loss of youth and love, 'Peace, most gladly have I escaped the thing of which you speak : I feel as if I had escaped from a mad and furious master' ; for merely to be old is merely to be in a state of privation, it is to be

> '......a paltry thing
> A tattered coat upon a stick.'

It is to be the nearest scarecrow, the merest fiction and semblance of a man, an inanimate rag upon a dead stick. A man merely old, then, is worse off than youth ; if the souls of the young are captive, the old have, in this sense at least, no souls at all. Something positive must be added : and if the souls of the aged must be strong to seek that which youth neglects. Hence, the old must seek Byzantium ; that is the country of the old ; it is reached by sailing the seas, by breaking utterly with the country of the old and young ; all passion must be left behind, the soul must be free to study the emblems of unchanging thing."

Commentary

Though his body is deteriorating with old age, the poet is resolved to find compensation by achieving a new perfection of the soul. His soul must clap its hands for joy as it realizes it is approaching nearer to perfection (or heaven). He is thinking of how, when William Blake's brother died, Blake had a vision of his brother's soul going up to heaven and clapping its hands for joy. The soul must also 'sing'—an idea which combines the ideas of singing for joy and of writing poetry. To teach his soul to sing he must metaphorically sail to Byzantium. The only way in which the soul can learn to sing is by studying monuments of its (soul's) magnificence, such as, Byzantine art. The poet thinks that mere condemnation of youthful sensuality will not suffice. Old age itself is no solution. Merely to be old is to be

> '......a paltry thing
> A tattered coat upon a stick'—

a mere scarecrow, the merest fiction and semblance of a man, an inanimate rag upon a piece of wood. This is also described in *The Tower* :

> "What shall I do with this absurdity
> O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail."

The man merely old is absurd, and age has been tied to him like the dog's tail, if he does not seek anything positive. 'Something positive must be added,' and if the soul can wax and grow strong as the body wanes, every step in the dissolution of the body—'every tatter in its mortal dress' is cause for a further augmentation of joy.'

But this can be possible if the soul can rejoice in its own power and magnificence. "Nor is there singing-school but studying," which is less colloquial and syntactically tighter than—

> "And there is no singing-school like studying
> Monuments of its own magnificence."

His singing-school must be among those monuments that only perfect civilizations of the past (say Byzantium) have produced. The soul of the old must be strong enough to seek what youth ignores. Hence, the old man must seek Byzantium, the country of the old. The poet, therefore, breaks his ties with the passion of the young man and sails to Byzantium in search of emblems of unchanging things.

Stanza 3

Paraphrase

The poet visualizes the great artists in history standing like mosaic figures in holy fire in heaven and, thus, undergoing a process of purification. He fervently prays to them to come down from that holy fire, moving rapidly with a circular, spinning motion, and to teach his soul to sing with artistic pleasure. They should purify his heart of all sensual passion, for he can no longer enjoy pleasure of the senses. Purged of all passions, the poet wishes to become a part of the immortal products of art.

Word-meanings and Notes

Sages—great artists in history.

God's holy fire—the fire of the Eternal artificer (artist) which purifies as well as moulds into artistic shapes.

O sages standing in God's fire—a fervent prayer not to God but to God's saints. The mystic mind has often thought that the intervention of the reached ones—Ali among the Shias, Koot Hoomi and Morya for the Theosophists—is necessary before one can properly attune himself to the divinity which is man. So the poet prays to them to help him get over his passion.

N.B.—This line also reflects Yeats's leaning towards the Theosophists.

Mosaic—Byzantium was known for its mosaic art. In mosaic work figures are made out of pieces of coloured glass or some precious stones. In ancient Byzantium, angels, saints. etc., were represented in mosaic on the walls of churches.

Perne—the bobbin of the spinning mill.

Gyre—the wheel-like rotating something.

Perne in a gyre—move in a circular motion (which alone is possible to eternal things.

And the singing-master of my soul—the saints should teach him how to sing, *i. e.*, they should enter the poet's heart and fill it with pleasure in the music of the sphere.

Consume my heart away—heart is the seat of passion. The poet prays to the saints that they should purify his heart of all sensuality.

Dying animal—the poet himself, old and decrepit and unable to enjoy sensual pleasures.

It—the poet's heart.

Artifice—that which art produces.

Explanation. The old man (the poet) prays to the sages who really stand in God's holy fire and have merely the semblance of image in gold mosaics to write down from their more celestial part of the cone of the universe to his more natural part, and be his singing-masters. He requests them to fill his heart with the music of the heavenly spheres. The poet's heart is sick with desire, and fastened to a dying animal (the heart here means soul which is tied down by the mortal body) sick with desire. His heart is the last seat of passion and ignorance. He requests the saints to consume his heart, sick with desire, to instruct his soul and gather him into the artifice of eternity. Even Byzantium, so long as the flesh be present, is no country for old men.

Commentary

The phrase 'perne in a gyre' was used in the poem *Demon and Beast* (1918).

The juxtaposition of fire and music in the stanza may be traced back to his statement in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, that is, 'In the condition of fire is all music and all rest.'

The phrase 'gather me/into the artifice of eternity' goes back to *The Tables of the Law* (1895) where he had written of 'that supreme art which is to win us from life and gather us into eternity like doves into their dove-cots.'

The image 'God's holy fire'—combines several previous ideas. Isaiah (vi. 6) describes how, when God wished to inspire him, one of the seraphins touches his lips with a live coal. Plotinus (born A. D. 203) stressed the idea of escaping from the body and the material world......Yeats took many of his images from drawing to Blake that had remained vivid in his memory.—(E. L. Blake).

Perne in a gyre—a perne is the spool or bobbin on which thread is spun. To perne is to move with a circular spinning motion. Yeats noted that when he was a child in Sligo he could see a column of smoke from 'the pern mill' and was told 'pern' was another name for the spool on which thread was wound. Yeats picked up the word when he was a boy and his grandfather owned a cotton mill at Sligo. The image is of a shuttle revolving round and up the walls of time in an upward spiral movement, leaving behind it the thread as a clue by which the depths may be explored again.

In several poems, especially *The Second Coming*, Yeats thought of successive ages as a system of gyres or spirals of predestined events. The gyre is always expanding or contracting, therefore two cones symbolized the double effect of such tensions as are set up by the conflict between the heart and the head. The two cones point in opposite directions, and the apex of one coincides with the base of the other. Within the cones moves the perne, the spool which unwinds the thread that the previous age has wound. As each age reaches its movement the gyre widens or expands till it disintegrates, and the new age begins to unwind the old thread.

Singing-masters—"Yeats had read Plutarch's idea that the souls of enlightened men return to be school-masters of the living whom they influenced unseen."—(E. L. Blake).

Stanza 4

Paraphrase

Once the soul of the poet is disembodied, he would never again enter the body of any other living creature. He will rather choose to be transformed into such form of art as that of the artificial birds made by the goldsmiths of ancient Greece. He would like to be a golden nightingale as was fashioned by Byzantine artists to sing the past, the present and the future, to keep the king of Byzantium, lords and ladies awake.

Word-meanings and Notes

Out of nature—dead.

Natural thing—any living creature. The reference is to the theory of transmigration of souls.

Gold enamelling—gold can be covered with a colourful, glossy coating which fuses with it under heat and then hardens. Byzantium was famous for its gold enamelling.

But such a form......make—Yeats wrote, "I have read somewhere that in the emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang."

Explanation. The poet believes that once he is dead (out of nature) his ghost can choose to take any bodily shape. His choice will be an artificial singing-bird made of gold by a Byzantine craftsman. (The poet insists on gold because it is Platonic symbol of perfection). This golden bird will be so lovely that even the drowsy emperors will keep awake. Once out of nature he will renounce all physical incarnations. He will be the imperishable thing, the golden bird, a work of art, beyond decay. The golden bird sitting upon a golden bough will sing to lords and ladies of Byzantium of what is past, or passing, or to come. This golden bird will be unlike the dying generations of real birds who sing of—"Whatever is begotten, born and dies."

Thus, the fourth stanza expresses the desire of the poet. With the destruction of the flesh the soul will be free of physical ills ; and if, as in Plato's myth of Er, the soul after death is free to choose some new embodiment, it will never again elect the flesh which is so quickly corruptible and which enslaves its passion ; it will choose some such form of art as that of the artificial birds in Theosophilus's garden ; it will be of incorruptible and passionless gold ; and it will dwell among leaves and boughs, which are also of incorruptible and passionless metal ; it will sing of the past, the present and of the future lords and ladies of Byzantium (to those whose ears are attuned to that divine wisdom). Elder Olson writes, "And now all sources of conflict are resolved in this last ; the old has become the ageless ; impotency has been exchanged for a higher power ; the soul is free of passion and free of its joy, and sings as youth once sang, but now of "what is past, and passing, and to come"—of the divisions of Eternity—rather than or "whatever is begotten, born, and dies"—of the divisions of mortal time. And it has here its country, its proper and permanent habitation."

Commentary

1. The last stanza gives a vivid picture of the object of art which the poet would like to become. Yeats's note on this is familiar : "I speak of a bird made by Grecian goldsmiths. There is a record of tree of gold with artificial birds which sang. The tree was somewhere in the Royal Palace of Byzantium. I use it as a symbol of the intellectual joy of eternity, as contrasted with the instinctive joy of human life."

2. The poem itself is as cleverly constructed as the bird the poet will like to become. "There is," says Cleanth Brooks, "irony and wit—serious wit—in a phrase like 'the artifice of eternity'."

3. The artificial bird is an image of supernatural wisdom ; its sources are legion. It may come from the Order of the Golden Dawn, it may come from elsewhere in Yeats's reading, perhaps as Enrest Schanzer suggests from a childhood memory of Hans Anderson's *The Emperor's Nightingale*.

4. Sturge Moore in his letter of April 16, 1930, had attacked the golden bird of *Sailing to Byzantium* as an essentially natural thing : "Your *Sailing to Byzantium* magnificent as the first three stanzas are, lets me down in the fourth, as such a goldsmith's bird is as much nature as a man's body, especially it only sings, like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come, to Lords and Ladies."

A Critical Appreciation of 'Sailing to Byzantium'

Background of the Poem

Sailing to Byzantium, the first poem of the volume entitled *The Tower*, was composed in 1928 after the poet's illness from Malta fever. By that time Yeats had gathered sufficient knowledge about Byzantium, the capital of the Roman Empire, which was famous for its magnificence, advancement of civilization and culture, and above all for arts. Yeats had thorough familiarity with the Byzantine art and mosaics through his study of works and through his visit to Italy. Speaking about the heights and specialities of Byzantium, Yeats has written : "I think that in early Byzantium, may be never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers—though not, it may be, poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have frown abstract—spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. They could copy out of old Gospel books those pictures that seemed as sacred as the text, and yet weave all into a vast design, the work of many that seemed the work of one, that made building picture, pattern, metal-work of rail and lamp, seem but a single image..."

It is to this world that Yeats wants to sail. It is a world in which artists and poets can reflect 'the vision of a whole people'. He wants to leave the world of the sensual pleasures and craves for a living amidst artificers. Yeats has put his soul into his poem. The search for spiritual life has been represented by journey to that city. Byzantium becomes a symbol of spiritualism.

Subject of the Poem

The subject of the poem is not the historical city of Byzantium but 'a country of the mind', a city outside Time and Nature, a Utopia, a retreat from old age and decay, a sailing from the mentality that values the pleasures of sexuality and the flesh to one which values things of the mind, the spirit and the soul. The poet is growing old, and he finds that the country, Ireland, where he is living at present, is not suited to an old man. It is a country in which all lives, all people are given to sensual and sexual pleasures. Birds, beasts, fish and human beings of young age are all indulging in the sensual acts of sex, and, therefore, nobody bothers for works of art and literature. Hence, it is safer and better for him to sail to a newer, more spiritual world, for old age is a time of physical decay and decline when man becomes as worthless and helpless as a scarecrow. He is a contemptible figure, a mere "tattered coat upon a stick," unless he devotes himself to the study and enjoyment of art. Since Byzantium is the traditional home of art, the poet has decided to go there to devote himself to the study of its rich treasures.

So the subject of this poem is really the same as that of *The Song of Wandering Aengus* and *The Shadowy Waters*, the quest for a timeless existence transcending the world of sensuous experience But now this theme is embodied not in the vaguely beautiful symbols of romantic love but in images which (to use Ben Jonson's phrase that Yeats was fond of quoting) are 'ram'd with life' :

"That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees—
Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect."

Against this 'richly concrete evocation of instinctive life' the figure of the old poet is seen, at once slightly ridiculous and yet frightening :

"An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless

Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For ever tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing-school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence :
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium."

"In *The Song of Wandering Aengus* the poet's imagination is not capacious enough to include laughter. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, he can laugh at the absurdity of the scarecrow body of the old man and yet retain his dignity and seriousness. The laughter is drowned in the noble music that announces the voyage to the holy city of Byzantium, no dim wrath like the 'glimmering girl' of the earlier poem but the concrete splendour of the Byzantine mosaic representing a timeless world that lives with a life more intense than that of the 'dying generations' of the first stanza :

"O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul
Consuming my heart away ; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is ; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity."

"*Sailing to Byzantium* is a meditation on timeless existence or eternity..... "—(Pinto.) In it "an old man faces the problem of old age, of death, and of regeneration, and gives his decision. Old age, he tells us, excludes a man from the sensual joys of youth ; the world appears to belong completely to the young, it is no place for the old ; indeed, an old man is scarcely a man at all, he is an empty artifice, an effigy merely, of a man ; he is a tattered coat upon a stick. This would be very bad, except that the young also are excluded from something ; rapt in their sensuality, they are ignorant utterly of the world of the spirit. Hence, if old age frees a man from sensual passion, he may rejoice in the liberation of the soul ; he is admitted into the realm of the spirit ; and his rejoicing will be increasing according as he realizes the magnificence of the soul. But the soul can best learn its own great works, but in turning to them, he finds that these are by no means mere effigies, or monuments, but things which have souls also ; these live in the noblest element of God's fire, free from all corruption ; hence, he prays for death, for release from his mortal body ; and since the insouled monuments exhibit the possibility of the soul's existence in some other matter than flesh, he wishes reincarnation, not now in a mortal body but in the immortal and changeless embodiment of art."—(Elder Olson).

"There are, thus, the following terms, one might say, from which the poem suspends : the condition of the young, who are spiritually passive although sensually active ; the condition of art considered inanimate—that is, the condition of things which are merely monuments ; and finally, the condition of art considered as animate—as of such things as artificial birds which have a human soul. The second term, important and unspiritual old age, is a privative, a repugnant state which causes the progression through the other various alternative terms, until its contrary is encountered. The first and the third terms, are clearly contraries of each other ; taken together as animate nature, they are further contrary to the fourth term, inanimate art. None of these terms represents a wholly desirable mode of existence : but the fifth term, which represents such a mode, amalgamates the positive elements and eliminates the negative elements of both nature and art, and effects, thus, a resolution of the whole, for now the soul is present, as it is lodged in a "dying animal", as it would be in the body of the aged man ; the soul now free to act its embodiment is now incorruptible and secure from all the ills of flesh.

About these several oppositions the poem forms : The whole turns on the old man's realization, now that he is in the presence of the image of Byzantium, that these images have souls ; there are consequently two major divisions which divide the poem precisely in half, the first two stanzas presenting art as inanimate, the second two, as animate ; and that the case be seen from such signs as that in the first-half of the poem the images are stated passive objects—they are twice called 'monuments', they are merely objects of contemplation, they may be neglected or studied, visited or not visited, whereas in stanzas III and IV they are treated as gods which can be prayed to for life or death, as beings capable of motion from sphere to sphere, as instructors of the soul, as sages possessed of wisdom ; and the curious shift in the manner of consideration is signalized by the subtle phrasing of the first two lines of stanza III :

> "O sages standing in God's holy fire
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall."

According to the first part, the images at Byzantium were images, and one should have expected at most some figurative apostrophe to them : "O images set in the gold mosaic of a wall, much as the sages stand in God's holy fire" : but here the similitude is reversed, and lest there should be any error, the sages are besought to come from the holy fire and begin the tuition of the soul, the destruction of the flesh.

"Within these two halves of the poem, further divisions may be found coincident with the stanzaic divisions. Stanza I presents a rejection of passion, stanza II an acceptance of intellection ; then, turning on the realization that art is insouled, stanza III presents a rejection of the corruptible embodiment, and stanza IV, an acceptance of the incorruptible. There is an alternation, thus of negative and affirmative ; out of passion into intellection, out of corruption into permanence, in clear balance, the proportion being I : II : III : IV ; and what order these sections is their dialectical sequence. That is, passion must be condemned before the intellect can be esteemed ; the intellect must operate before the images are insouled precedes the realization that the body may be dispensed with ; and the reincarnation of the soul in some changeless medium can be recognized as a possibility only through the prior recognition that the flesh is not the necessary matter of the soul. The parallel opposition of contraries constitutes a sharp demarcation : in stanza I, a mortal bird of nature amid natural trees sings a brief song of sensual joy in praise of mortal things, of 'what is past, or passing, or to come' : and similarly, in stanza II a living thing is found to be an inanimate artifice, 'a tattered coat upon a stick,' incapable of motion, speech, sense or knowledge, whereas in stanza III what had appeared to be inanimate artifice is found to possess a soul, and hence to be capable of all these. A certain artificial symmetry in the argument serves to distinguish these parts even further ; stanzas I and IV begin with the conclusions, and the I is dependent upon the II for the substantiation of its premises, as the IV is dependent upon III." —(Elder Olson).

This highly allusive and complex poem bears out Stock's contention that Yeats's poetry is a battle-ground for the clash of opposites. The poet has not only rendered the opposites—"country-city, sexuality-intellectuality, dying-unageing, body-soul, flesh-spirit, holy-unholy," but he has also tried to reconcile them by conceiving, in the manner of Plotinus, a city outside Time. As Cleanth Brooks points out, "The poem can be taken on a number of levels : as the transition from sensual art to intellectual art : as the poet's new and brilliant insight into the nature of the Byzantine imagination ; as the poet's coming to terms with age and death." So we can study this poem on many levels. We can take Byzantium as the holy city of Eastern Christendom. We can also take Byzantium as Yeats's holy city of the imagination as Golgonooza was Blake's. We can take this poem "as the transition from sensual art to intellectual art ; as the poet's new and brilliant insight into the nature of the Byzantine imagination, as the poet's coming to terms with age and death."

Mr. Alex Zwerdling opines that this poem is a debate which emphasizes the dichotomy between physical and spiritual very sharply. "The country" and "the holy city" are set against each other, the one a world of youth, sex, and decay, the other a world of art, religion, and the changeless. The reconciliation is never sought. This conflict can be compared with that of Keats's *Ode to Grecian Urn* in which 'heard melodies are sweet but also unheard are sweeter.' Mr. Ellmann says : "The poem gathers its tension from the dramatic conflict of passion and wisdom. But though wisdom conquers, its victory is almost Pyrrhic. The poet has sailed to Byzantium, but his heart, 'sick with desire', is full of Ireland and he cannot speak of the natural life without celebrating it......His prayer and ambition are also impure ; those personages to whom he prays, being figures in the mosaics or sages in God's holy fire, or both, are already removed from life, but he wishes to escape even further. He asks, therefore, not to become a sage like them, but to be turned into a beautiful, mechanical bird which will have wisdom placed in its mouth by its fashioner. He will be liberated not only from life but from all responsibilities by being transmuted into an image, which, in turn, will sing not of would be eternity but of time.

"*Sailing to Byzantium*, which begins *The Tower*, is a poem Yeats was destined to write. The distillation of his poetic life pours into it and yet, in the end, it shapes and defines itself. It is interesting to know that the 'salmon-falls' are in the Sligo River, that the soul clapping its hands recalls Blake's vision of his dead brother, that Yeats before writing the poem had embarked on a systematic study of Byzantine art and history, and that he draws on visual memories of the mosaics of Ravenna, Palermo and Cefalu and possibly of the Stadhus at Stockholm. More important, perhaps, is Yeats's conviction that in early Byzantium, may be never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, 'that architect and artificer' spoke to the multitude and a few alike, and that building picture pattern, metal work of rail and lamp were made to synthesize into a 'single image'. Yet, even these comments should be used with caution. Byzantium may represent transcendence, the world out of nature, the artifice of eternity ; but the poem itself embodies Blake's proposition that eternity is in love with the productions of time.

"The heart of the poem lies in its deep sense of the organic continuity between the worlds of flesh and spirit, in the union which the language itself achieves between monumental form and ardent energy. In four taut stanzas of *Ottava Rima* the great contraries of youth and age, life and death, change and changeless and nature and art disclose themselves in a creative interdepedence where each demands the other for its completion. Whatever may be the nominal thrust of the poem, the undertone of the imagery reshapes it so that the very movement of rejection recreates the thing that is rejected. The sensual music of youth is richly recognized and is reflected in the contrapuntal music which the soul sings to redeem its tattered body. 'Monuments of unageing intellect' evolve subtly into monuments of magnificence ; the inner life assumes the organic richness of the natural world from which it is disengaged. Standing in the gold mosaic of art and in the holy fires of reality, descending into the gyres of the soul's history, the sages incarnate both energy and stillness, the indestructible and its perpetual involvement in change. The interdependence extends even to minor details of language so that 'fastened' (a word suggesting an artificial linkage) is used to describe the soul's relationship to the 'dying animal', while 'gather' (a word suggesting a spontaneous natural process) describes its absorption into the 'artifice of eternity'. Finally, there is the golden bird of Byzantium (whether derived from Gibbon or Hans Andersen) presented to us in terms which at first suggest an uncompromising cleavage between the natural and the supernatural. However, the bird sings, not of eternity, but of 'what is past or passing or to come, thereby echoing, even in its cadence, the sensual music of whatever is begotten, born, and dies'. This particular paradox was too much for Sturge Moore, and the bird of the second Byzantine poem 'more miracle than bird or handiwork', scorning aloud the mine and blood of existence, is held to reflect Yeats's reaction to Moore's objection. The suggestion is made that on this particular occasion the poem may have been wiser than either Moore or Yeats."—(Dr. B. Rajan).

Symbols and Images

For the poet Byzantium is a symbol for the world of intellect and the spirit, as opposed to the world of senses of fusion of two cultures, a theocratic community where the orient and the occident merged into one. It is his conception of paradise where the soul is purified and the birds are singing in the golden trees representing intellectual joy. The dolphins carry the dead to paradise on their backs. The whole poem is evocative and has become a symbol for 'monuments of unageing intellect'. Yeats has used the elemental symbols of earth, air, fire and water. 'The Byzantine image is associated with the image of the golden bough on which the mechanical bird will be set and this inter-linking immensely increases the complexity of meaning.' The images are complex. 'Hammered' implies effort ;'gold' implies purgation : 'gold mosaic' implies hardness ; 'holy fire' suggests a mode of purification through suffering ; and the 'gyre' suggests the revolution of historical cycles. 'Dying generations' (birth and death compressed into a phrase) recalls Keats's *Ode to the Nightingale* and 'the artifice of eternity' reminds us of Keats's *Ode to Grecian Urn*. Yeats has put his soul into this poem. The search for spiritual life has been represented by journey to that city. Byzantium also represents a world of art and culture. The realm of art is immortal. God in the poem stands less in the position of a Christian God than in that of supreme artist, artificer of eternity and the holy fire Byzantium has also been treated as a symbol of purgatory where the souls are purified. In the second stanza, the golden bird, a symbol of immortality and art has been used. The Golden Tree with its Golden Bird also reminds us of Yeats's association with the Golden Dawn, its magical practices and the Tree of Life. The Golden Bird is the soul which has become pure The Golden Tree is the tree of life. It appears that Yeats has been inspired and motivated to borrow certain images and ideas from Cumont too. The symbols linked with the cock and the dolphin found in Yeats and Roman sarcophagi indicate Yeats's indebtedness of Cumont.

None-the-less, *Sailing to Byzantium* should he read in conjunction with its sequel, *Byzantium*, written four years later. The first poem is a picture of voyage from the meterial world to the holy city of eternity, the second is a vision of the city from the inside where the soul is imagined, first as a walking mummy and then as the Emperor's golden bird, whose 'glory of changeless metal' is contrasted with the 'complexities of mire and blood.' Here Byzantium is a Purgatory as well as a Paradise, a place of cleansing flame :

> "Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
> Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame."

29

THE SECOND COMING

Introduction

The widespread murder and bloodshed in Ireland, consequent upon the Easter Rebellion of 1916, the Irish Civil War which followed the Great War, and the various other events in Europe filled Yeats with gloomy forebodings. *The Second Coming*, which was published in the American Magazine, *The Dial*, in 1920, derives its force and significance from his inner gloom. In this astonishing poem, remarks Prof. A G Stock, "Yeats sets his own age in the perspective of eternity, and condenses a whole philosophy of history into it, so that it has the force of philosophy.

The poem is based on Yeats's system in *A Vision*. Hence, the poem requires some knowledge of Yeats's philosophy of history for a clearer understanding. Yeats believed that the process of history was a cyclic one. He compared it to the movement of rapidly rotating gyres or cones. The gyres spin swiftly round a fixed centre. Their circumference widens as they rotate and ultimately disintegration sets in. The disintegration begins at the circumference, and gradually reaches the centre. Yeats believed that the present cycle of history began two thousand years ago ; Christ came, and a new civilization was born out of the ruins of the earlier one, such as, the Graeco-Roman civilization which in its turn began in 2000 B. C., with the mating of god Zeus with Leda. Helen and Clytemnestra were born as a result of this union, and then followed the various events narrated in the Homeric epics

Similarly, the Christian civilization has almost run its course of two thousand years. Hence, a 'Second Coming' is imminent. History repeats itself though with a difference. The present wheel of history has come full circle, and out of its ruin a new civilization is taking shape. To us the birth of a new civilization may appear to be the doom of the old ; its values may appear to us monstrous and terrifying, the very thoughts may be a nightmare to us, but certain it is that a change is in the offing, and it is possible that the future is already being shaped in some remote, far off region. All this and much more is condensed in this remarkable poem of twenty-two lines.

Stanza 1

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Explanations

Gyre—a cone or wheel to rotate rapidly. In *A Vision* (1925-1937), the two gyres (the primary gyre and the antithetical gyre) represent antithesis. The primary gyre stands for the physical characteristics whereas the antithetical for the spiritual characteristics.

Falcon—small bird of prey trained to hunt and kill other birds and small animals. Here, symbol of soul or the spiritual and emotional part of man's make-up.

The falcon......the falconer—the falconer has lost control over the falcon which does not hear the falconer's call. The falcon cannot hear the falconer because of the distance between the two (depending on the system of gyres). The touch is lost. The centre cannot govern. The falcon's loss of contact implies man's separation from every ideal of himself that has enabled him to control his life whether this comes from religion, or philosophy or poetry. It is also, in more general terms, his break with every traditional tie. It may also mean that emotion (falcon) has separated itself from intellect (the guiding principle of the falconer), or it may mean that knowledge is not guided by the spiritual influence of man.

Things fall apart ;......hold—as a result of the falcon's separation from its controller, the falconer (break-away of emotion from intellect, etc., or man's separation from spiritualism) has caused disruption and convulsion. The centre, therefore, cannot hold and the forces of disorder, previously only deaf to the voice of the falconer, now become eruptively dominant. The rapid motion of the gyre generates a centrifugal force which sends things flying away from the centre.

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world—the word 'loosed' finally conveys both the ebbing power of coherence of the centre, and the unleashing of destruction as an active force. The gathering force of anarchy is shown by this word. Everywhere there is anarchy because of man's separation from spiritualism and his total acceptance of and subservience to science and materialism.

Blood dimmed tide—this phrase strengthens the sinister situation, and intensifies the idea of anarchy. The phrase also suggests the Great Biblical Flood and the havoc it caused. The 'blood-dimmed tide' is a tide of violence, a tide both dimmed by blood and in the blood itself, and is related to the violence of *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*—"Now days are dragon-ridden" and "Violence upon the roads", "Violence of horses", etc. There is violence and bloodshed because of the Easter Rebellion, Irish Civil War, and the Great European War of 1914-1919.

The ceremony of innocence—the traditional and aristocratic way of life which fostered purity and innocence.

The ceremony of... is drowned—anarchy is let loose in the world and there is an all-round convulsion in which all finer qualities are destroyed. Everywhere the traditional way of life, a way which has always fostered purity and innocence, is in the danger of extinction.

Paraphrase

The poem begins abruptly as if the poet is seeing a vision and expressing it, and in his trance he sees a gyre or cone rotating rapidly round a fixed centre, informing about and signalling towards a change of civilization and age. Its circumference gradually widens and ultimately even the centre fails to control its movements. Disintegration sets in ; things fall apart, the centre cannot hold. The falconer has lost control over the falcon, because of the lack of contact—man has to cease to hear the call of soul (spirit) because the world is too much with him. Since intellect and materialism (science, technology and rationalism) is too much with us, it is leading us towards destruction. As a result sheer anarchy is let loose ; everywhere there is violence and bloodshed. Disruption and convulsion is prevailing everywhere The centre cannot hold the control. Consequently, traditional and aristocratic life and thereby innocence and purity are in danger of extinction. The best, the wisest, the aristocratic have lost all faith and conviction, and the worst, the masses, are fanatical, irrational, and violent.

N.B.—(1) Yeats in the first stanza alludes to the widening gyres and represents how things are falling apart. In the present era, there are anarchy and lawlessness, the innocence has been sacrificed and the tide of misery has spread. Yeats sees the end of the modern materialistic civilization to be followed by another, the movement of civilization denoted through the intermingling gyres. Yeats himself has written in a note to the Cuala Press edition of *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* : "The end of one age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction. At the present moment of life, gyre is sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion. The revelation which approaches will however take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre."—(Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats*, pp. 165-66)

(2) "This poem conveys the terror of a coming antithetical civilization. It creates its effect by its images, by disgust at the prevalent anarchy, by horror at the overcoming of innocence, and by its slow, remorseless revelation of the nature of what is to come ; the image, gradually glimpsed, is finally appreciated for its brutality. It is slouching towards Bethlehem, the traditional holy place of Christian worship, to be born."

(3) The 'blood-dimmed tide' suggests the Great Biblical Flood that caused havoc.

(4) R. P. Blackmur defines the last two lines of the first stanza, the best minds, being subjective, should have lost all faith though desiring it, and the worst minds, being so nearly objective, have no need of faith and may be full of 'passionate intensity' without the control of any faith or wisdom.

Stanza 2

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Explanations

Revelation—the apocalypse or the disclosure of sacred truths by God, either directly or through a prophet or some other agency.

Thus, these sacred truths were revealed two thousand years ago through Christ. Now a second coming seems to be in prospect for this very purpose.

Spiritus Mundi—in Yeats's philosophy "a general storehouse of images which have ceased to be the property of any personality or spirit." It is equivalent to Jung's 'Collective Unconscious'. "More directly, in fact, than out of the *Spiritus Mundi* it is out of the British Museum, which Yeats frequented a great deal when he was in London. It is one of these frightening Assyrian lions with bird's wings and bearded human faces, which make us think how utterly alien to us some early civilizations are."

Slouches—an awkward, ungainly movement.

Bethlehem—the place where Jesus Christ was born about two thousand years ago.

Paraphrase

All this anarchy and violence, decadence and disorder implies that a new civilization is about to be born. Just as God incarnated himself in the form of Christ when the Graeco-Roman civilization broke down about two thousand years ago, so also the second coming of the God seems to be at hand. The sight of this anarchic vision gives the poet a feeling, perhaps a conviction, that the Second Coming (a new, second *'avatar'*) is at hand. As soon as the thought flashes across the poet's mind, he sees the image of some vast form coming out of *Spiritus Mundi*, the spirit of the world, a kind of storehouse of images in Yeats's philosophy, may be the animating force of the world. The poet sees it, and is horrified to see, a sphinx-like being, "a shape with lion's body and the head of a man, a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun" somewhere in the desert. This figure is coming out of some far desert and moving slowly with a clumsy, awkward movement towards Bethlehem, the birth-place of Christ, as if it, too, would be born there. The figure is so monstrous, so nightmarish that the birds fly before it in terror. The monster has a pitiless destiny ; it cannot be clearly seen. It symbolizes mindless and merciless violence, and its birth is the death of the present civilization. It is coming to undo what has been done, for a new era is to be ushered in amidst blood, toil, and tears.

A Critical Appreciation of 'The Second Coming'

The Second Coming was first published in the American magazine, *The Dial*, in November, 1920. Later on, it was included in the volume entitled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). It was written at a time when Yeats was puzzled by violence displayed by events like the Easter Rebellion of 1916, the Irish Civil War that followed it, and the European Great World War of 1914-1919. The times were out of joint ; and in terms of his philosophy of history, a new age in the world's history was going to begin. He believed that a full circle of the wheel, that is the moon, corresponds in time to approximately 2000 years. At the beginning of each one of such two thousand year-period, a new dispensation is announced. This pattern could be seen in the history of the world from about the year 2000 B. C. In that year the egg of Leda is supposed to have been hatched out. In Greek mythology, Leda was the mother of Helen, Castor and Pollux, and Clytemnestra. These were her children by her union with the great god Zeus, who appeared to her and made love to her, not in his own form, but in the assumed form of a swan. From the date that Zeus appeared to Leda, the first known age of the world began. This age was at its full maturity (full moon) by about the year 1000 B. C. when Homer sang about it. At about the time that Jesus was born (another interference by God in human affairs), that Leda-Zeus age was over, the Christian age was begun. In the twentieth century that Christian age, in its turn, was coming to an end ; the poet believed that a newer age was therefore due. One may or may not agree with the poet's system ; but without taking note of it, some of his important poems will be unintelligible. One such poem is *The Second Coming* written with the Irish troubles, the Great War and other troubles in mind, and displaying his philosophy of *A Vision* which he was to formulate and organize in 1925.

The poem "consists of twenty-two lines, in two verse paragraphs, the first of eight lines, and the second of fourteen. There is no scaffolding or preparation. The poem opens, as if it were, in the midst of a vision. The poet sees a widening gyre (a circular motion which has the effect of broadening the thing going round and round) which is going at top speed. The controller, in so far as there is any, cannot control its movement. This is compared with the activity of the falcon who cannot hear the falconer because of the distance between the two, or because the falcon is at such emotional heat that it refuses to be guided by its master. The result is all-round convulsion in which all finer values of life are lost ; anarchy is let loose upon the world. The better people are without a sense or commitment, they have no opinions, they are, as if it were, neutral ; while the worst, the undesirable, the rabble, are full of fanatical passion and exhibit their violent tendencies.

"The sight of this anarchic vision gives the poet a feeling, perhaps a conviction, that *The Second Coming* is at hand, a new *avatar* is in the offing. The poet now sees the image *Spiritus Mundi*—the spirit of the world—may be the animating force of the world—which is "a general storehouse of images which have ceased to be the property of any personality or spirit" as the poet puts it elsewhere. Anyway, the poet sees, and is horrified to see, a sphinx-like being "a shape with lion's body and the head of a man, a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun" somewhere in the desert. The vision is suggestive of evil. It is coming to undo what has been done, for a new era is to be ushered in amidst blood, toil, and tears. Some rough beast is slouching (going in ungainly, lounging gait) towards Bethlehem (where Jesus was born at the beginning of the age that is now closing) to be born. What that rough beast is cannot clearly be seen."—(**B. P. Misra**).

The poem manages to use Yeats's system without becoming servient to it. The poet's mind is equally stuffed with the anarchy and the blood-dimmed tide of the modern world :

> "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned ;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity."

"Readers, not at all interested in Yeats's system, have seen it as a vivid prophecy of the advent of Fascist and other totalitarian systems and the growing destructiveness of war and dehumanization of political activity in our time. It may well be that Yeats's reaction, less against the First World War, which did not deedly engage his emotions, than against the growing violence of rebellion, repression, and finally Civil War in Ireland was the deep emotional spring of the poem."—(G. S. Fraser). Graham Martin, however, has rejected the thesis of MacNeice that "Yeats had a-building fascist inside himself"

Dr. B. Rajan makes the following observations about this poem :

"*The Second Coming* is one of the half-dozen or so poems by Yeats which specifically mention gyres. His restraint in using the technical term is significant and in fact no special knowledge is needed to respond to the sense of circling, inexorable movement which the first line conveys, both through the repetition of 'turning' and the fourfold repetition of the sound. 'Widening' suggests first the increasing scope of the movement and, in conjunction with the next line, its increasing uncontrollability. The sound echo between 'falcon' and 'falconer' dramatizes the growing loss of contact. The next line extends disintegration from the circumference to the core. The centre cannot hold and the forces of disorder, previously only deaf to the voice of the falconer, now become eruptively dominant. 'Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world' : the word 'loosed' finely conveys both the ebbing power of coherence at the centre, and the unleashing of destruction as an active, ending force. 'Mere anarchy', with its suggestion of worse things to come, is carried to climax in 'blood-dimmed tide', an image potent in its fusion of blind passion with apocalyptic, world-destroying violence. Against these catastrophic forces, the ceremony of innocence is a frail dyke indeed and the very word 'ceremony' helps to suggest the almost formal character of the resistance. The stanza drives to a conclusion which might seem a piece of generalizing, were it not for the rage of imagination behind it. Backed up by the poem, it is decisively, angrily concrete. The wisdom of the best, the centre of conviction, the moral basis of order has collapsed ; the world lies upon the 'passionate intensity' of those who plunge forward on the blood-dimmed tide.

"The tide, with its evocations of the deluge and the flood, prepares us for an impending revelation ; and the expectation is strengthened by the repetition of certain key phrases—'Surely,' is at hand', and 'the Second Coming'. Carefully controlled repetition is in fact an important feature of the poem, and is clearly intended to carry a certain sense of history into the poem's tactics. The Second Coming itself is a repetition with a difference.

"As the poem moves into the dimensions of prophecy, the shape of its revelation is established with ominous vagueness. The image out of *Spiritus Mundi* is vast not only in sheer size, but because it is beyond comprehension, because its consequences have still to be fully grasped. It troubles the sight—the word, with its almost physical sense of an effort to focus, conveys not only the fitful, elusive character of revelation but the grim implications of the revelation itself. 'Somewhere in sands of the desert' leaves the location purposefully vague, while the wave-like motion realizes with poetic accuracy the landscape of undulating desert sand. The shape with lion's body and the head of a man could, in a different context, suggest the union of power and intelligence, but the first stanza has foreclosed this possibility and the next line moves the shape forward into a frame of mindless and merciless violence. Searches after the system may find it difficult ro reconcile a 'gaze blank and pitiless as the sun' with an antithetical-lunar dispensation, but the image remains threateningly appropriate to those who believe that the poem has its own rights. 'Moving its slow thighs' once again conveys with Yeats's unfailing immediacy, the clumsy, powerful stirring of the shape into life. The shadows of the desert birds reel away from it in the giddiness of nightmare but also because, accustomed as they are to death, they find themselves in a presence from which they are obliged to recoil. As the darkness drops over the desert of prophecy, we realize that every civilization chooses its executioner. Every order, because it is order, has its own shape of exclusion, but things it excludes must one day rise to destroy it. Each stony sleep creates its specific nightmare and, in the rocking cradle, looks on the birth of its death. The shape moves into ferocious actuality, each monosyllable a step forward by the rough beast, with the 'ou' sound four times repeated, conveying with almost tactile immediacy the shambling progress of the nightmare into life. Even the word 'Bethlehem' with its evocations of love and mercy is almost spat out in the run of the verse. The grim authority of the last lines is profound evidence of the poem's loyalty to its logic, of its determination not to stop short of total honesty."

"The impact of *The Second Coming* derives from its archetypal power, a power that takes the poem beyond its 'thought', into a deeper world of mythical embodiment. Even the genesis of the poem reveals its thrust towards the archetypal ; Stallworthy's presentation of the various manuscript drafts shows how specific references to Pitt Burke and the German advance into Russia were discarded and how in its evolution, the poem moved steadily to its twin objectives of universality and immediacy. Yeats himself seems to have been prepared to learn something from the poem. His original note saw in it the end of 'our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization' and there is nothing to suggest that he regretted the ending. Later, however, the poem became symbolic to him of 'the growing murderousness of the world' and, in 1938, he was quoting it to Ethel Mannin as evidence of his attitude to fascism : 'Every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe.' *A Vision* which describes an antithetical dispensation as 'expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical' seems to inherit something from the rough beast and Yeats's comment, that 'a civilization is a struggle to keep self-control' is acted out in the first stanza of the poem with an authenticity unattainable even in poetic prose. The poem lives outside the philosophic texts and, if anything, illuminates those texts ; but it is always considerably more than the texts. At the critical moment, Yeats tells us, 'the *Thirteenth Cone*, the sphere, the unique intervenes.' It has to be so with the poetic imagination at its most creative."

The poem is written in blank verse. Its texture is enriched by typical Yeatsian half-rhymes, of Anglo-Irish rhymes, like 'gyre' and 'falcons', 'hold' and 'world', 'man' and 'sun'. The first stanza of the poem is notable for its deliberate use of a kind of high rhetoric rather than images—'mere anarchy', 'the blood-dimmed tide', 'the ceremony of innocence', etc. In the last stanza, there are three key-images : a desert, the flight of birds and a terrific monster moving slowly in the vast stretch of sands. The dominant idea is of ferocity, immensity, and vastness, and a feeling of terror is called forth by the emerging pattern in which images apparently dissimilar are linked together by the controlling power of the poet's vision. The dramatic and dynamic quality of Yeats's great poem arises out of a complex process of absorption and elimination. He discards all that is redundant, and nothing that is significant, seizes on the intense moment of a situation, and consequently, evokes from the reader an immediate reponse to the poetic passion. Here, as in *Byzantium* and many other poems, he follows this technique. "In the very first line we are in the midst of the whirling movement of the gyre, and feel that the phase of disintegration has begun. Then image after image is evoked—bird-flight, incarnadined sea-waves, the tempestuous tremor. the vast stretch of sands, the blank pitiless gaze of the monster, indignant desert birds, and these lead the reader's mind through a crescendo of horror, through the torture and terror of hell.

The poem has reflected some of Yeats's most esoteric ideas, the ideas which he was to develop in his book of 'Occult Philosophy'. Yet the poem is free of the system. It is also the picture of the violence and terror of wars and revolutions, of man's unparalleled brutality The symbols and images are ambivalent and complex. The poem has received a good deal of praise at the hands of critics. For A. G. Stock, the poem has the very force of a prophecy. The ominous shape has been left purposely vague and indeterminate to suggest that the shape of things to come is beyond human comprehension. It appears monstrous and terrifying to us only because it supersedes our traditions and ways of life. Maybe, it will be regarded as beneficent and generous like Christ himself by the generations to come. Prof. Blackmoor praises it for its right use of words. Dr. B. Rajan sees in it the very perfection of Yeats's technical perfection. According to C. M. Bowra, the poem is an expression of a vision. "The measured verse, the repeated phrase, the simple and terribly effective images convey this moment of concentrated and amazed vision." And to A. N. Jeffares, "This is probably Yeats's most powerful poem ; its effect is cumulative, it states a situation and envisages its development, its essence is dramatic as well as philosophic, lyric as well as elegiac."

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SEPTEMBER, 1913

Introduction

Responsibilities is a collection of poems about various responsibilities—(1) supernatural responsibilities (*The Grey Rock*), (2) social responsibilities (The 'Lane-pictures' and 'Playboy-riots' poems, (3) personal responsibilities (*Friends*, and the poems to Iseult and Maud Gonne), (4) aesthetic responsibilities and the poems on beggars and hermits which define the responsibility to irresponsibility.

The 'Lane' poems grow out of one of the three public controversies that stirred Yeats's imagination. The other two were over Parnell and over Synge's 'Playboy'. To Yeats, their moral was 'that neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with receptivity to become wise, or just or generous enough to make a nation.' Art is presumably the indispensable third element.

The controversy began when Hugh Lane, Lady Gregory's nephew, offered his valuable collection of French paintings to Dublin if a suitable permanent gallery to house them were built. Lane's preference was for a bridge gallery by Lutyens spanning the Liffey, but Lutyens had been born English and the Dublin nationalists had the bias for an attack that began with the bridge but ended by including Lane and his paintings. Lane wanted that the gallery be financed by the city, and if it was not possible, by private subscription. An attempt to raise the money by subscription produced a discouraging response and the city's final offer was a tenth of what was required. Lane, in what Yeats described as 'a moment of pique', loaned the pictures to the London National Gallery and bequeathed them to that gallery in 1913. Later he added a codicil under which the pictures would have to be returned to Dublin if a building were provided for them within five years of Lane's death. Unfortunately the codicil was unwitnessed and Lane went down with the *Lusitania* before it could be witnessed.

Yeats wrote his poem "To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved that the people wanted pictures." W. B. Yeats attacked Lord Adilaun who had maintained that money should not be made over unless public demanded an art gallery and was involved in the controversy. His poem was answered by William Martin Murphy, the director and owner of the *Evening Herald* and *The Irish Independent*, two popular papers ; Murphy saw his reflection in Yeats's poem, although Yeats's poem had been meant for another person. Humphrey felt that the attack was aimed at him in the following lines of Yeats's poem :

> "How should the world be luckier if this house,
> Where passion and precision have been one
> Time out of mind, become too ruinous
> To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun ?"

Having misunderstood Yeats's intention and the person who was attacked at by Yeats, Humphrey denounced Hugh Lane, his pictures and the idea of Gallery. Lane replied "from what he described as 'Paudeen's point of view'," etc. Yeats retaliated with *September 1913*, in which he found fault with the business mentality of the nationalists like Murphy.

Thus, *September 1913*, is an attack on the business-minded nationalists like Murphy. Such persons are born to pray and save. He bewails the death of the romantic Ireland. The old heroes are dead and gone. Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tonne died for the nation. Ardent nationalists they were imbued with emotionalism. With Murphy's rationalism it was not possible.

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Explanations

Fumble—handle or deal with something nervously or incompetently.

Greasy—slippery ; little-minded.

Fitzgerald—Edward Fitzgerald (1753-1798) laid down his life for the Irish cause. He fought in the American War on the British side, but made preparation for a rebellion against England, was betrayed and captured. He died of wounds sustained at his arrest.

Wolfe Tonne (1768-1798)—another great Irish leader who committed suicide.

Robert Emmet (1778-1803)—another great Irish national figure. He was captured, tried and hanged.

Paraphrase

September 1913, originally subtitled "On Reading Much of the Correspondence Against the Art Gallery" is an admirable poem consisting of four stanzas of eight lines each. It was Yeats's next attack against the hucksters who fumble in a greasy till. The poem is reported to have been most directly occasioned by a lockout of strikers who were led by James Larkin, one of Lane's strongest supporters among the workers. The employer's group was headed—as one might expect—by William Murphy. By citing O'Leary in the refrain of his poem, Yeats was attempting to discredit nationalists of Murphy's make-up, who were born to pray and save, and whose nationalism had its object the lining of their own pockets rather than the establishment of a great nation. Maud Gonne, who may have found the reference to prayer offensive, declared, Yeats had lost contact with the men working for Ireland's freedom ; but irony was never her strong point and she astonishingly read the poem as a statement abandoning hope for Irish Independence. All that delirium of the brave which offended others was not, of course, intended to suggest that the brave were delirious but rather that their sacrifice was emotional than rational.—(Adopted from Unterecker).

So, *September 1913*, is at once the expression of his sorrow and anger and tribute to an old leader, O'Leary. This great leader passed away in 1907, and with him had passed away a certain liberal outlook on life. The new leadership was little-minded : it 'fumbled in a greasy till'. Yeats had no sympathy with them :

> "What need you, being come to sense
> But fumble in a greasy till
> And add the half-pence to the pence
> And prayer to shivering prayer until
> You have dried the marrow from the bone ?
> For men were born to pray and save :
> Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
> It's with O'Leary in the grave."

Beginning with these lines, and the refrain—

> "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
> It's with O'Leary in the grave."

that he composed this fine tribute to past leadership and elegy on the modern one. In some early poems, the poet had used refrains, but perhaps never yet so happily as now.

The first stanza hits at the shameful reality of the so-called leaders collecting money from their poor followers. Patriotism, it seems, is little more than the work of collecting pennies and half-pennies, as if men were 'born to pray and save'. The second stanza, rather sentimental in tone, gives a loving picture of the older leadership. They had neither the time to save money nor to offer prayers. Theirs was a harder task of real constructive work. The third stanza, rather rhetorical, asks the question : Was it for this that the older leaders made such sacrifices ? Many were exiled or exiled themselves (the wild geese) ; many like Edward Fitzgerald (1753-1798) laid down their lives. Others like Robert Emmet (1778-1803) were captured, tried and hanged. Still others like Wolfe Tonne (1768-1798) committed suicide. Their struggles, "that delirium of the brave", were of no advantage if their successors were merely to go about making and collecting money.

The fourth and the last stanza concentrates on what any one of those great people would say of them. The modern will not be able to recognize their patriotism. Modern leadership will think that the other leaders were perhaps the victims of some love-affair ; else they would not have laid down their lives so easily. Anyhow, it does not matter. They are with O'Leary in the grave.

"The poet," says a critic, "has thus created a new legend, a legend of Irish struggle for freedom and of those who died for the freedom of a country which knows them not, and of whom it is unworthy. There is throughout a note of fierceness, and as Prof. Henn puts it, "The refrain takes up a fiercer cleaner note, even to the insolence of the false rhyme at the ending, in what is perhaps the most powerful of the political ballads."

"The clinical word 'delirium', placed arrestingly in the torrent of rhetoric, suggests not only how heroic action appears to the Paudeens, but also its real nature, 'fantastic, extravagant......and altogether reckless', as it is in Yeats's ideal of the tragic theatre. The wild geese remind one of Cuchulain's identification of himself in *The Green Helmet*......These are the ideals buried with O'Leary ; action capable of reaching into reality has been replaced by a 'shivering' prudence".—(Dr. B. Rajan). Here the language is that of common speech but, as in Synge's poems, it is ennobled by sheer intensity of passion.

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TO A SHADE

Introduction

This short poem of three stanzas was written in 1913 and appeared in the volume entitled *Responsibilities.* Like other poems of this period, this poem also is related to the contemporary Irish Nationalistic themes. It is addressed to Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) who was the Irish Parliamentary Leader, and who fell into disfavour of the Irish Party and the Church dignitaries, and ultimately lost his dignity because of his love-affair with Mrs. O'Shea. Even Gladstone disowned him in politics. Parnell had rendered a great service to Irish people, but when they repudiated him, showed hatred instead of gratitude, he was rudely shocked and died of a broken heart. He was buried in Glasnevin cemetery, Dublin, and a monument was erected to commemorate his memory in O'Connel Street, a posthumous recognition of his work at last.

Parnell's spirit has been hovering near the memorial erected to him just to drink of the salt atmosphere of the sea. If so, the poet would like to give it a word of advice. It should go away ; the Irish have not improved ; 'they are at their old tricks yet'. Just as they were incapable of realizing that he was doing them the best of services and, therefore, drove him away for what really did not concern them, they are still capable of ingratitude and incapacity to understand selfless service. It is best, therefore, that Parnell's ghost should hide itself in its Glasnevin grave (wherein Parnell lies buried) ; it should not come out. Dublin is not yet fit to receive him. He is safer in the tomb.

Stanza 1

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Notes

Gist. The poet imagines that the spirit of his friend has arrived to look at its monument or inhale the salt sea-breeze or view the old tottering buildings looking grand under cover of nocturnal darkness, then go back immediately after satisfying its desire.

Thin Shade—the disembodied spirit ; ghost.

Monument—memorial.

Happier-thoughted—pleased.

Salt breath—the salt-laden breeze.

Gaunt—old and tottering.

Put on majesty—look grand.

Paraphrase

The poet imagines that the shade or ghost of Parnell has revisited the town. Perhaps he has come back to the town to have a look at the memorial erected in his honour. Or, perhaps he has returned to the scene of his earlier exploits to inhale the salt air coming out of the sea. He has revisited the town at night time, when men have retired to the nightly rest, when only sea-gulls fly about, and old, decayed houses appear grand and majestic. It is in the fitness of things that the shade has come there in the darkness of night, because the Irish people are still as mean and ungrateful as they were in his lifetime.

Stanza 2

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Notes

Gist Your enemies had heaped insult and driven away with disgrace a man who had bestowed on them a gift which would have inspired their children and children's children with nobler and sweeter sentiments and ideals.

A man......kind—the allusion is to Hugh Lane, the nephew of Lady Gregory. He was a great painter who offered to present his paintings to Irish Gallery if a suitable art gallery were provided.

Working in their vein—running in their blood ; inspiring them.

Gentle blood—people of noble birth ; good and kind-hearted people.

Open-handedness—generosity.

An old foul mouth—reference is to Murphy, an enemy both of Parnell and Lane.

Had set the pack upon him—had defamed him and hounded him out.

Paraphrase

The poet advises the spirit to go back to the world from where he has come, because the Irish people were still at their old trick of being inimical and ungrateful to those who are good, sacrificing and generous. Hugh Lane, the nephew of Lady Gregory, was like Parnell. He was full of a passion for service. He had heroic qualities and traditional virtues. He had bestowed on the Irish people by way of gift his collection of French impressionist paintings. It was a precious gift which would have been a source of inspiration to generation after generation of the Irish people. Yet the ungrateful and heedless and heartless Irish masses did not realize the importance and significance of the Hugh Lane's gift, and instead of showing gratitude to Lane for his generosity, they drove him away from Dublin with disgrace. An old foul mouth of Murphy, his great enemy, opposed Lane as he had opposed Parnell.

Stanza 3

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Notes

Unquiet wanderer—uneasy spirit.

Glasnevin coverlet—the tomb at Glasnevin, the grave in which Parnell was buried.

Dust stops your ear—you are placed beyond earshot under the dusty cover of the grave.

Paraphrase

The poet advises the shade of Parnell, the unquiet wanderer, to go back to its grave, for Ireland is not a fit place to visit and live in. It is not yet ripe to receive it. Safer place for the spirit is its grave in Glasnevin. If it says there in Dublin, it will hear only calumny and slander. Parnell had suffered much in his lifetime, and to listen to the Irish people's slander about him once again would be further sorrow. Hence, the shade of Parnell must leave Dublin for a safer place like the cemetery where Parnell lay buried.

A Critical Appreciation of 'To a Shade'

This short poem was composed on September 29, 1913. It consists of three stanzas which stretch up to twenty-six lines. Like the other poems in the volume in which this appeared (*Responsibilities*), it is an Irish theme. It commemorates a great Irish national hero—Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891)—who made great sacrifices and suffered a lot for the sake of Ireland and was the leader of the Irish Freedom Movement. But later on he was disowned by the people of Ireland and England as a great leader because of his love-affair with Kitty O'Shea He died broken-hearted.

The poet imagines that the spirit of Parnell has come from across the great unknown to view the memorial built in its honour. Or the spirit has returned to the scene of his activities in life and inhale the salt air blown from the seaside. The spirit has come to the town at night time when people have all retired and only the sea-gulls are indulging in their nocturnal flights. Old and decaying houses have acquired a peculiar grandeur under cover of darkness. It is only fit that the spirit has come when darkness of the night pervades all round over the land because the Irish people are still as petty-minded and ungrateful as they were when he moved among them in flesh and blood :

"If you have revisited the town, thin Shade,
Whether to look upon your monument
-(I wonder if the builder has been paid)
Or happier-thoughted when the day is spent
To drink of that salt breath out of the sea
When grey gulls flit about instead of men,
And the gaunt house put on majesty ;
Let these content you and be gone again ;
For they are at their old tricks yet."

And, therefore, the poet advises the spirit to return to its abode, that is, its grave, because Ireland is not yet fit and ripe to receive it. Not only Parnell was tortured and looked down upon by the Irish people, but also another great, generous and self-sacrificing person, Hugh Lane, was driven out of Dublin and insulted and disgraced by them. Hence,

"Go, unquiet wanderer,
And gather the Glasnevin coverlet
About your head till the dust stops your ear,

The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come ;
You had enough of sorrow before death—
Away, away ! You are safer in the tomb."

The beauty of this poem is not only in its tone of colloquial ease, and quite friendliness, but also in its capacity to suggest and insinuate things. The third line, for example, is a parenthesis, suggesting that though the Dubliners have erected a statue to him, they have perhaps not paid the architect for his labour. If Parnell has been allowed to do his work, and not let down, their children and children's children would have acquired lofty thoughts. As it is, they don't deserve 'your' attention. The familiar tone that the poet has adopted has at one blow made him the equal of that great leader. The poet has, thus, set about making his personal myth and as time goes on he will more and more entrench himself into a place of pride in the history of Ireland.

This suggestive poem throws light on several aspects of Yeats's art. It clearly brings out his aristocratic bias and his contempt for democracy. Passionate, generous men, like Parnell and Hugh Lane, cannot thrive in a democratic set-up. The aristocracy is the guardian of art, culture, and traditional values ; the people, on the other hand, are ungrateful and mean, unable to appreciate the good that may be done for them by heroic souls. The poem is also a fine instance of Yeats's ability of transforming the particular and imparting to it a universal significance. The poet, thus, makes new myths out of material essentially prosaic. It also illustrates Yeats's metaphysical habit of uniting a variety of moods and tones within the same stanza, and even the same line. In line third of the poem, "I wonder if the builder has been paid", the tone is both elegiac and ironic.—(David Daiches). The familiar, colloquial tone of the poem is also worth noticing.

To quote Dr. B. Rajan, "*To a Shade* brings us back to a world more thorny than the wind-swept landscape of thorn-trees. Ironically, if the ghost of Parnell were to revisit the town, it would be either to contemplate his monument (the entombment of all that he stood for) or in circumstances in which the town is given dignity by the elimination of the human element :

'When grey gulls flit about instead of men,
And the gaunt houses put on majesty.'

In any case, history repeats itself, and Lane, a man of Parnell's own 'passionate serving kind', has been insulted for his pains and disgraced for his open-handedness :

'Your enemy, an old foul mouth, had set
The pack upon him.'

There is no place for the shade here, for even a marginal concession to Parnell's spirit, for the minor remnants of the noble which would permit the ghost to listen at the corners. What Parnell represents is more likely to survive in the tomb than in the reality of contemporary Ireland."

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THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS

Introduction

The Song of Wandering Aengus is one of the early poems of W. B. Yeats. It was published in the volume entitled *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899). Instead of the misty mood, he was now after utter simplicity, but his simplicity was very often expressed in what the general reader, were the counters of an unknown coinage. He was more and more engrossed in Celtic legends. *The Song of Wandering Aengus* is also a poem in the Celtic legendary vein. It expresses the poet's personal experience through an Irish legendary figure, Aengus. Aengus in Celtic Mythology is the Master of Love. His song is a recital of one of his amorous adventures.

Stanzas 1, 2 and 3

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Notes

Aengus—in Celtic Mythology, the Master of Love. Here symbolic of the poet himself.

The Song of Wandering Aengus—Aengus's song is a recital of one of his amorous adventures.

Hazel-wood—the forest full of small trees of edible nuts (may be the symbol of reddish brown eyes full of love).

Trout—fresh water fish valued for food and for the sport of catching (with rod and line).

Paraphrase

One fine morning, Aengus went to the forest to cut a branch of hazel-wood, tied a little berry to it, and went about fishing. When white moths were flying, and moth-like stars were flickering out in the sky, he dropped the berry in the stream and caught a little silvery fish, valuable for food and sport, with his rod and line.

Having laid the fish on the floor, Aengus (the poet) went to blow the fire aflame to cook it, but soon he found that the fish had become a 'glimmering girl', who called him by his name and ran away. This glimmering girl had an apple-blossom—she was fair, and beautiful like an apple, and disappeared soon

Since then the Master of Love, Aengus, has been wandering here and there through hollow lands and hilly lands, and will continue to do so till he locates her and is able to kiss her and satisfy his love. Though he has grown old wandering in search of his love, yet he would go on searching her in the long-dappled grass (the grass that is marked with rounded patches of different colours or shades of colour) till eternity.

On a closer examination we will find autobiographical traits in the poem—the Master of Love (Aengus) is Yeats : the shimmering girl is his 'apple-blossomed' Maud Gonne. He meets her, but she, while tugging at his heart, is evading pursuit. The lover does not know how to set her heart aflame. He has become mad for her love and makes the decision to follow her throughout the world till he has realized his desire of meeting and kissing her.

N. B.—Unterecker has brought out the autobiographical traits in the following manner :

"One way to read the poem, is of course, to remember that Yeats had first seen Maud Gonne standing beside a bouquet of apple-blossoms and that he always identified apple-blossoms with her complexion. A better way to see the poem is as a versification of the legends, Yeats paraphrases in his notes about women of the Sidhe who, disguised as fishes, enchant living men. And perhaps best of all is to see it as poem constructed from light itself. Driven to the hazel-wood by the 'fire' in his head, Aengus goes fishing in the twilight of dawn when 'white moths' fly and when the 'moth-like stars' flicker out, the time, as Yeats often pointed out, when miracles are most likely to take place."

A Critical Appreciation of 'The Song of Wandering Aengus'

The Song of Wandering Aengus is one of Yeats's early poems. It was included in *The Wind among the Reeds*, published in 1899. It was the time when Yeats was in deep love with Maud Gonne who had rejected him. Yeats developed intimacy and friendship with Mrs. Olivia Shakespeare who could not divorce her husband to marry Yeats. Yeats was, therefore, both dejected and frustrated in love. As a poet he had developed a style and method of expressing personal feelings and experiences through Celtic images. In this poem, too, the image of Aengus fishing in the stream of a hazel-wood has a Janus-like double function. On the one hand it describes the Celtic Master of Love reciting one of his amorous songs, on the other hand but simultaneously, it conveys in full intensity and emotion Yeats's love with Maud Gonne.

One fine morning Aengus went to the forest to cut a branch of hazel-wood, tied a little berry to it, and went about fishing :

> "I went out to the hazel-wood,
> Because a fire was in my head,
> And cut and peeled a hazel-wand,
> And hooked a berry to a thread ;
> And when white moths were on the wing,
> And moth-like stars were flickering out,
> I dropped the berry in a stream
> And caught a little silver trout."

So he caught a silvery fish. While he was making fire to cook it on, the trout (fish) became a 'glimmering girl', who called him by his name and ran away. Since then Aengus, the Master of Love, has been wandering here and there to satisfy his love, to meet and kiss her, and is ready to do the same till eternity. Although he has grown old enough searching and searching for her, yet he is not ready to give up his effort till he is not able to pluck the silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun :

"When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rushed on the floor,
And someone called me by my name,
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple-blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air."

The passion and emotional intensity, the depth and permanency of love can be seen in the following lines :

"Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands ;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun."

This third (last) stanza of the poem at once brings to our mind the autobiographical traits—Yeats's love affair with Maud Gonne whose bewitching beauty made him mad.

As Unterecker and other critics have observed, the poem manifests Yeats's interest in the women of the Sidhe, who disguised as fishes, enchant living men, and in Maud Gonne whose pursuit he was not ready to give up till he died. "One way to read the poem, is, of course, to remember that Yeats had first seen Maud Gonne standing beside a bouquet of appleblossoms and that he always identified apple-blossoms with her complexion. A better way to see the poem is as a versification of the legends Yeats paraphrases in his notes about women of Sidhe who, disguised as fishes, enchant living men. And perhaps best of all is to see it as a poem construed from light itself. Driven to the hazel-wood by the 'fire' in his head, Aengus goes fishing in the twilight of dawn when 'white moths' fly and when the 'moth-like stars' flicker out, the time, as Yeats often pointed out, when miracles are most likely to disappear."—(Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to Yeats*, p. 91).

Symbols in this poem are comparatively less complex and less crude. They are subtleties drawn from the legendary past of Ireland—the Celtic Mythology which at this phase of Yeats's poetic career was a constant source of inspiration and imagery to Yeats. Aengus stands for the poet himself, 'fire' in the mind is the passion or fire of love, 'hazel-wood' represents the world. 'Fire aflame' is the fire of love which he wants to aflame in the heart of the woman, 'silver trout' is Sidhe who has been converted into 'a glimmering girl', Maud Gonne. 'Apple-blossom in her hair' refers to the apple-like beauty and complexion of Maud. "Hollow lands and hilly lands" are the places in England and Ireland where the poet has been pursuing and chasing Maud Gonne. The disappearance of the girl hints at the rejection of Yeats by Maud Gonne.

No doubt, the poem is based on the "versification of the legend" about the women of Sidhe who disguised themselves as fishes and attracted men. In essence it is mythological. But by connotation it is autobiographical too, and versifies Yeats's love for Maud Gonne.

The poem is also remarkable for its music and lyric note, and above all its imagery of the light—'fire', 'white moths', 'moth-like stars flickering out', 'aflame', 'glimmering girl', 'silver trout', 'brightening air', 'the silver apples of the moon', 'the golden apples of the sun'—all suggest light and twilight of dawn, the time, as Yeats pointed out, when miracles are most likely to take place.

The poem is a poem of the Celtic Twilight. It has elevated the personal to the archetypal. The poem is doing two things at the same time. It is letting us deep into the poet's love-stricken heart ; and, if we do not know or care for his plight, the poem may just be a pretty story of the pathos of the lover's—any lover's plight.

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THE THREE BUSHES

Introduction

In his earlier phases of poetry, Yeats wrote poems and plays on his nation's folklore. During his last phase, too, he once again valued of the significance of the Irish folklore and Irish folkpoetry. He is said to have written to Edmund Dulac at that time that he wanted "to get back to simplicity", and he decided that the best way to do it was "by writing for our Irish unaccompanied singing." This project led not only to ballads, but as well as to the grafting of ballad characteristics on to the conventional lyrics. *The Three Bushes* was one of such experiments, and appeared in his *Last Poems*. Yeats was of the opinion that the art of poetry is traditional and the sources of inspiration inhered in the folk-songs and arts. He rightly wrote to Dorothy Wellesley that art should be rooted in peasant life. He not only wrote ballads, but also composed poems on the ballad pattern.

William Butler Yeats wrote two Chamber-maid songs and sent them to Dorothy. He also recorded that *Three Bushes* depicts in a dramatic manner the conflict between soul and body, and is founded upon an incident from the *Historia mei Temporis* of the Abb Michel de Bourdeilie.

In this poem "the subjective daylight lady struggles her consciousness of sin and the objective chamber-maid accepts strange might which brings the lover to her. In spite, however, of the two women's determination to 'cram love's division' by each offering the lover her own speciality, each cannot help speculating what it must be like to be the other. Each in a sense, is mask for the other and envies that thing which she cannot be."—(Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide*, p. 264).

"The ballad-and-lyric sequence called *The Three Bushes* has a like duality. It tells the story of a lady, in love both with her knight and with her own virginity, who sent her chamber-maid to take her place in his bed. The lover was deceived and all went well for a year. But on the first anniversary, riding too furiously to his tryst, his horse caught a foot in a rabbit-hole and he fell and broke his neck. The lady died of a broken heart, and was buried beside him. The chember-maid planted a rose-bush on each grave and kept the secret till her own death-bed confession to a priest ; and

"He bade them take and bury her
Beside her lady's man,
And set a rose-tree on her grave,
And now none living can,

When they have plucked a rose there,
Know where its roots began."

"Considered as a love-story it has that shade of prevarication that tinges the whole medieval cult of love. Dorothy Wellesley objected, justly from this point of view, that the lady's deception was unforgivable, if she loved with her soul she should have surrendered her body or else let him go. But to Yeats it was an allegory of the body and the soul of love, and the lover, not either of the women, was the central figure. He told the story with all the skill of the anonymous ballad-singers of old times, barely and tersely, yet leaving out no detail needed to make it live as he saw it. The knight was a minstrel, and it was for his song's sake that the lady promised to sleep with him ; the first verse as it rushes into action presents the whole situation :

"Said lady once to lover,
'None can rely upon
A love that lacks its proper food ;
And if your love were gone
How could you sing those songs of love ?
I should be blamed, young man'."

Likewise, it was for song's sake that he died, for before his break-neck gallop home he had lingered in some tavern to sing once more :

" 'A laughing, crying, sacred song,
A leching song,' they said.
Did ever man hear such a song ?
No, but that day they did.
Did ever man ride such a race ?
No, not until he rode."

So *The Three Bushes* is 'a laughing, crying, sacred song, a leching song', a ballad and lyric.

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THE TOWER

Introduction

The Tower is one of Yeats's most well-known and matured poems. It was included in the collection entitled *The Tower* (1927). The poem is dated October 7, 1925. Yeats at sixty was becoming blind of one eye and even a little deaf. In 1915, he had bought the Norman Tower, Thoor Ballylee (Ballylee Castle), in Galway (Coole Park), and wished to make it 'a setting for my old age, a place to influence lawless youth, with its severity and antiquity.'

The Tower is a powerful poem in which the leading motif is the feeling that the poet is physically becoming weak everyday, while his passions, political and personal, are getting stronger. In his youth, the poet had read and edited Blake ; in his old age he reverted to that mystic. He was especially touched by a fragment of one of that poet's letters in which there was a reference to his old age—an apt description which was equally true of Yeats himself ; in it Blake had written, "I have been very near the gates of death, and have returned very weak, and an old man feeble and tottering, but not i spirits and life, not in the real man, the imagination which liveth for ever. In what I am stronger and stronger as this foolish body decays." With such thoughts and feelings, the poet sat in his Tower (the old-fashioned building he had bought in Galway, which had become his aristocratic symbol), and surveyed the entire scene about him.

In his early prose, for instance, he described how a man ought to waken into eternity without leaving the body :

> "I am orthodox and pray for a resurrection of the body, and am certain that a man should find his Holy Land where he first crept upon the floor, and that familiar woods and rivers should fade into a symbol with so gradual a change that he never discover, no, not even in ecstasy itself, that he is beyond space, and that Time alone keeps him from Primum Mobile, the Supernatural Eden, and the White Rose over all."

"In his early poetry," says Prof. Stock, "this prayer remains incompletely answered. The rhythm, the imagery, the carefully chosen vocabulary all betray his awareness that he has left the actual world to inhabit a world of vision. But in *The Tower*, when he looks out on the landscape, mind and place, the visionary and the actual, have become indistinguishably one." In *The Tower*, Yeats has fused man and nature, action and vision.

Now Yeats turned from books to men; though in landscape and life. 'That the heart grows old' and 'The living beauty is for younger man', he reached a maturity of vision from which an astringent, athletic quality emerged, and he justly hoped to—

> "Dine at journey's end
> With Landor and with Donne," —(*To a Young Beauty*)

For he wrote many a—

> "Poem may be as cold
> And passionate as the dawn." —(*The Fisherman*)

'Cold passion' could be called the central theme of the poems in the volume *The Tower*, opines Prof. Bullogh, "previously they had been symbols with a penumbra of indefinite associations, now they were chastened and defined, their excrescent tendrils lopped." Under the stress of this new severity the suave rhythms gave place to more broken freer measures, owing something to free verse as well as to Georgian experiments in 'substitution'. He was also influenced by the imagists.

In the poems *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, Yeats achieves magniloquence, final authority and self-possession. The centre of gravity is the "I" created and dramatized by the poet. He now has properties, surrounds himself with emblems and locates himself in a personal landscape having a certain imaginative order. On the map, this country is not so much the Sligo of his youth, Lough Gill, Ben Bulben, and the share of Roses, as the countryside south of Galway—Thoor Ballylee, Coole Park, and the stony lands on the borders of Clare.

The tower and the winding stair are Yeats's key-symbols. The tower symbolizes solicitude, asceticism, night and solitary intellect. The collection is full of bitterness which later on was described by Yeats himself. Most of the poems startle and surprise. Images of sterility dominate *The Tower*, "regeneration and sexuality" act as shaping force in *The Winding Stair*. "The focus is primarily on things masculine and political in *The Tower*, on things feminine and aesthetic in *The Winding Stair*."

Graham Hugh observes, "The conflict between an acceptance of the natural world and the denial of it involved in an assumption of the mask is the theme of his greater verse—'The Tower' and the two 'Byzantium' poems." Whereas his earlier poetry is "almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world and a summons to that flight"; it is not the poetry of insight, but of longing and complaint. The Tower is a contrast to this earlier phase. As Dr. B. Rajan says, "*The Tower* etches new lines into the mask of age. The "tattered coat upon a stick' becomes 'a sort of battered kettle at the heel', and the singing soul, which once studied its own magnificence, must now bid the 'Muse go pack', deal in 'abstract things', and choose 'Plato and Plotinus for a friend'. Once again the movement is qualified by the undertow; the 'excited, passionate, fantastical' imagination is still capable of writing poetry, and exhibits that power in the offhand diction and in the exuberant energy which overflows the quatrains.

Section 1

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Explanations

Absurdity—nonsense.

Decrepit age—old age. Yeats was sixty years old, almost blind of one eye and hard of hearing.

Never had......imagination—although the poet is getting physically weak, yet his passion is increasing.

Ben Bulben—a hill near Sligo where Yeats had lived as a boy with his maternal-parents. 'Ben' is the Irish form of the word 'mountain'. Yeats loved Ben Bulben very much ; and the scene appears in some of his poems too.

Plato—the great Athenian philosopher (427-348 B C.) whose philosophy inspired a great volume of thought which became known as Platonism, and, through the Neoplatonism, profoundly influenced Christian thinking.

Plotinus—the founder of Neoplatonic philosophy, born about 203 A.D. and died in 262 A.D. His main line of thought is inspired by Plato, but unlike his master, he seeks a way of mystical escape from the concrete world.

Paraphrase

The first section begins 'with a tremendous gesture of dissatisfaction with old age that had begun bothering him. It is at once a powerful and disgusting picture of the old man's senility and physical weakness. The poet does not know what to do with this absurdity, this decrepit old age, and compares it with some rattling thing tied to a dog's tail. His eyes and ears, his imagination and passions are as strong as ever, perhaps stronger than even in his youth. Perhaps it is time that he bade farewell to poetry, and took to reading Plato and Plotinus, getting interested in metaphysics, else he will be insulted and his name dragged in the mire.

Section II

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Explanations

Pace upon—walk upon with slow or regular steps.

Battlements—flat roof of a tower or castle enclosed by parapets with openings through which to shoot.

Declining beam—declining light.

Ridge—raised line where two sloping surfaces meet.

Explanation. Yeats writes, "The persons mentioned are associated by legend, story, and tradition with the neighbourhood of Thoor Ballylee or Ballylee Castle, where the poem was written. Mr. French lived at Peterswell in the eighteenth century and was related to Sir Jonah Barrington who described the incident of the ears and the trouble that came of it."

Mrs. French—In the eighteenth century, the age when Ireland had a Protestant aristocracy, Mrs. French lived near the Tower (Thoor Ballylee), her obedient servant tried to convert fantasy into reality. "Mrs. French whose servant, divining her wish, clipped an insolent farmer's ears and brought them in a dish, symbolizes both beauty and an aristocratic pride."

A peasant girl—Mary Hynes, whose beauty, celebrated by the blind poet Raftery, caused men to mistake the moonlight of the dream for the daylight of actuality. Mary Hynes is also described by Yeats in *Dust Hath Closed Helen's Eye.* In her the poet finds the replica of Maud Gonne.

A song—by Raftery, the blind poet. The English version of which is included in *The Celtic Twilight.* Mary Hynes and Raftery are for Yeats's symbols of the sorrow of beauty and of the magnificence and penury of dreams.'—(*Early Poems and Stories*, p. 169).

And one..... Cloone—an old weaver is reported to have said to Yeats, "There was a lot of men up beyond Kilbecanty one night sitting together drinking and talking of her (Mary Hynes) and one of them got up and set out to go to Ballylee and see her ; but Cloone Bog was open then, and when he came to it he fell into the water, and they found him dead there in the morning.—(*Early Poems and Stories*, p. 164).

Strange—(see line 36), 'praised the colour of her face.'

The tragedy—betrayal of living hearts. The poet thinks that Helen was a great betrayer.

Helen—Queen of Sparta and Troy, whose beauty described by the blind Greek poet Homer has ever been a byword.

Inextricable—that cannot be reduced to order, solved, untied or escaped.

Hanrahan—Hanrahan was Yeats's creation which his own imagination has conjured from his cards (in prose "*Stories of Red Hanrahan*", 1897, rewritten with Lady Gregory's help in 1907 and now included in *Early Poems and Stories*, pp. 397-412.) Hanrahan has been presented as a learned schoolmaster, always carrying a copy of Virgil and an inkpot. He was an admired song-maker.

In the legends of Hanrahan and Mary Hynes, the poet reads the story of his life.

Juggleries—shuffling of cards and bewitching them as described in line 67-69. Hanrahan was to have gone to meet Mary Lavelle, his beloved, but the old man in the barn (the 'ancient ruffian' of line 66) with his juggleries delayed Hanrahan's departure, made him pursue the magic hare, and so prevented the tryst.

He stumbled......knees for hire—"all that had happened in the barn had gone from him, and all of his journey but the soreness of his feet and the stiffness in his bones."—(*Early Poems and Stories*, p. 409).

For hire—as reward.

Twenty years ago—The Tower was written in 1925. Yeats wrote (or, rather rewrote) Hanrahan's story in 1907.

Baying creatures—hounds.

Bankrupt master of this house—Yeats writes in his notes that this 'bankrupt' lived over a hundred years ago, and adds—"According to one legend he could only leave the castle upon a Sunday because of his creditors, and according to another he hid himself in the secret passage."—(*Collected Poems*, p. 632).

That ruin—bankruptcy.

Dice—Cf. Yeats : "The ghosts have been seen at their game of dice in what is now my bed-room."—*Collected Poems*, p. 932).

Beauty's blind rambling celebrant—i. e., Raftery, the blind poet.

The red man......sent—Hanrahan again.

Gifted with so fine—mark the pun.

Those eyes etc.—of persons recalled in memory.

Considering—shrewd.

Paraphrase

The second section, much the longest and most interesting, is a survey, from the vantage point of the tower, of Irish history in terms of the decline of the aristocratic ideal. The poet is pacing on the battlements of the tower, looking at the trees near-about and asks them about the ups and downs they have withessed.

He recalls that once upon a time (in the eighteenth century, the age when Ireland had a Protestant aristocracy) near that tower lived one Mrs. French. She was extremely aristocratic. Even before she could speak, her wishes were guessed by her devoted followers, and on one occasion, her servant—

> "With the garden shears
> Clipped an insolent farmer's ears
> And brought them in a little covered dish."

In his younger days, the poet was told of a peasant beauty whom people praised in songs. People were mad to see her. Songs were written about her. Her name was Mary Hynes, and the blind poet Raftery sang of her beauty. He praised her face, her complexion, and derived great joy in doing so. In the song he glorified her very much and said that she was very beautiful. If she walked to a fair, farmers jostled at the fair to have a look of her.

People were maddened by hearing or reading the accounts of Mary Hynes's beauty in the songs of Raftery. These songs lilted them to have a look on her as many times as possible. Once having listened to the song they rose from the table in curiosity to test their fancy, to see if she was really as beautiful as described in the song. But they mistook the brightness of the moon for the prosaic light of day—music and wine had driven their wits astray—some men were so carried away that one of them got up and set out to go to Ballylee to see her, but was drowned in the bog of Cloone.

It is really strange and interesting that the man who wrote such a wonderful song to glorify the peasant girl (Mary Hynes) was himself a blind man. But it is quite normal with the blind men. Another blind poet (Homer) equally sang of the beauty of Helen. That is the pity that he portrayed a peron who betrayed living hearts. Passion makes people mad, that is why Helen became the cause of misery to so many.

The poet himself created Hanrahan who stumbled, tumbled, fumbled, and broke his knees because of "the horrible splendour of desire." He wrote on Hanrahan about twenty-five years ago.

Hanrahan was to have gone to meet Mary Lavelle, his beloved, but the old juggleries delayed Hanrahan's departure, made him pursue the magic hare, and so prevented the tryst. So Hanrahan had to chase the baying creatures (hounds).

There have been others whom nothing, neither love nor music nor the pleasure of revenge, could cheer. They died unhappy deaths. One of such people the poet knew. This man was once the owner of the house which is now the poet's. Yeats writes in his notes that this 'bankrupt' lived over a hundred years ago, and adds—"According to one legend he could only leave the castle upon a Sunday because of his creditors, and according to another he hid himself in the secret passage."—(*Collected Poems*, p. 632).

For centuries rough knights armed from head to foot climbed up the staircase of the tower ; and the poet would like to know from all these characters, the man, red Hanrahan, who got drowned in his anxiety to see the village beauty, Mrs. French—if they were as unhappy as the poet on the advent of old age. Then follow two very powerful stanzas, in which the poet questions his own Hanrahan (or, himself as the creator of that character), "the old lecher" who has known every mystery of love. The question he would like to ask is :

> "Does the imagination dwell the most
> Upon a woman won or woman lost ?"

The poet then remembers his own hopeless love for Maud Gonne, thinks that imagination dwells most upon the woman lost. When the memory of the woman one could not get is revived, "the day is blotted out," because one cannot but analyse how she was lost, and he will find that at the bottom of that loss was either lack of courage, or "some silly oversubtle thought." (This was the poet's explanation of his failure with Maud Gonne).

Section III

Word-meanings, Explanations and Paraphrase

Edmund Burke—Irishman, born in Dublin in 1729, died 1797. One of the foremost orators and liberal political thinkers of England.

Grattan—Henry Grattan, one of the greatest of Irish patriots and orators. He was born in 1746 and died in 1820. Yeats, opposing the bill to make divorce illegal, spoke as follows in the Irish Senate on 11 June, 1925, five months before the completion of *The Tower*—"We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke, we are the people of Grattan. We are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell." Yeats was highly proud of his stock.

Yeats acknowledges in his notes that in these lines he has unconsciously echoed one of the loveliest lyrics of our times—Mr. Sturge Moore's *Dying Swan*. It was once believed that the Swan sang beautifully once, and that just before its death.

Yeats writes—"When I wrote about Plato and Plotinus, I forgot that it is something in our eyes that makes us see them as all transcendence. Has not Plotinus written—'Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that soul is the author of living things'?"

Explanation (*lines* 181 *ff.*) Yeats declares that he will live the faith already enunciated in lines 148-56. The mind and soul of man are endowed with literally infinite powers, and these can help 'decrepitude' to remould itself in terms of ideality.

Cf. lines 157-165. Occupied with study and meditation as he will be, the outside world for him will fade away and 'leave not a wreck behind'.

Paraphrase

In the third section, the poet's mental conflict is over, and the transition to calmer thoughts is indicated by change over to a swifter and shorter line. He is now writing his will or political testament. He stands by the courageous people like Burke or Grattan who were not bound to any cause of the state (who were independent powerful thinkers and reserved their right to expose any side). He also declares that he neither cares for Plotinus nor Plato. He has nothing but contempt for them. The poet, like Faust of old, thinks of the infinite power of the human mind; and he has prepared his peace with things of art, memories of love and poetic imaginings. He will now make his soul till the wreck of his body seems as casual as the clouds of the sky.

A Critical Appreciation of 'The Tower'

Yeats bought the Tower in 1815. There he settled with his wife calmly. The tower became for him a symbol of soul's ascendancy, soul's upward union with its Maker. Unaffected by his times which witnessed the First World War and a number of other events—tragedies and deaths, he began to write poems about his friends and the state of soul. But the themes which dominated now were death and old age. But the tone still remained markedly bitter, for he could not at once spit out the bitterness caused by the frustration in love and failure in politics.

The poem, *The Tower*, is dated October 7, 1925. It was included in the collection of Yeats's poems entitled *The Tower* which was published in 1927. The Tower was the old-fashioned building he had bought in Galaway, which had become his aristocratic symbol, *The Tower* is a powerful poem in which the leading motif is the feeling that the poet is getting physically weaker, his body is decaying, but his spirit is getting stronger. He has reached a maturity of vision. Like Blake, Donne and Landor, he seems to 'dine at journey's end'. To quote Prof. Bullough, "cold passion" is the central theme of the poems in the volume *The Tower*, and this single poem is no exception to this. In it the poet achieves "magniloquence, final authority and self-possession".—(Peter Ure). Unlike his earlier poetry of dreamland and fairyland, the present phase of poetry witnesses his coming to wisdom and insight. He must now deal with 'abstract things' and choose 'Plato and Plotinus for a friend'.

The Tower is a companion piece to *Sailing to Byzantium* for it states the problem of old age and revolves round the image of the fisherman which Yeats had earlier used to portray as his ideal man. In the first section he refers to his own fishing on Ben Bulben as a boy. But now he is old. And he does not know what to do with this absurdity, this decrepit old age, and compares it with some rattling thing tied to a dog's tail. His eyes and ears, his imaginations and passions are as strong as ever, perhaps stronger than even in his youth. Perhaps it is time that he bade farewell to poetry, and took to reading Plato and Plotinus, getting interested in metaphysics, else he will be insulted and his name dragged in the mire :

> "What shall I do with this absurdity—
> O heart ! O troubled heart—this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me,
> As to a dog's tail ?
> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible—
> No, not in boyhood when with rod and fly,
> Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben Bulben's back
> And had the livelong summer day to spend.
> It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
> Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
> Until imagination, ear and eye,
> Can be content with argument and deal
> In abstract things ; or be derided by
> A sort of battered kettled at the heel."

Yeats then depicts some of the actual experiences. He recalls the past ghosts and the people around. Beyond the ridge, there lived one Mrs. French whose servant with garden shears chopped the ears of an insolent farmer. Mary Hynes's beauty was praised by Raftery. The farmers were so much moved by those lines that their wits were driven away and they took moonlit-night to be the day. Yeats's own creation, Hanrahan, pursued in frenzy the hare he had created from his cards in imagination. "The real and imaginary have become mixed up. The persons described above have been associated with the Tower. In the end, all the ghosts conjured up are left out. In the third part of the poem he chooses men who climb the stream. He bequeaths his pride to them and visualizes a swan fixing his eye upon a fading gleam. He sees in it his own death and mocks Plato and Plotinus." Hence, the second section is a *tour de force* of this passionate imagination. Images and memories are blended, as are the aristocratic Mrs. French, the subject of an eighteenth-century anecdote by Sir Joseph Barrington in his (*Recollections*) and the peasant-girl Mary Hynes (this story, and blind Raftery's poem about her are included in Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight*). The movement from Raftery to Homer, from Helen to Maud Gonne is subtle and economical. Then there comes the recollection of Yeats's invention of Red Hanrahan, and then the poet turns to the Tower's inhabitants. All of them are summoned to his query—Did they rage as he does against old age ? And the poem, through Hanrahan, the lover, turns to great penetrating and remarkable honesty about love :

> "Does the imagination dwell the most,
> Upon a woman won or woman lost ?
> If on the lost, admit you turned aside
> From a great labyrinth out of pride,
> Cowardice, some silly oversubtle thought
> Or anything called conscience once.
> And that if memory recur, the sun's
> Under eclipse and the day blotted out."

The last section winds its way through a praise of young man in the Anglo-Irish tradition of Burke and Grattan—"That gave, though free to refuse", and a praise of man's 'bitter soul', before returning to the young men to remark that the poet was once of their sort—a remark which links the poem together, referring back as it does to his own youthful fishing on Ben Bulben. Finally, he catches up love's memory and its passionate blotting out the day by using a twilight cadence, reinforced not by a Miltonic 'all passion spent' but by a soul he has been compelled to study while the body's decay had become worse—

> "Seem but the clouds of the sky
> When the horizon fades ;
> Or a bird's sleepy cry
> Among the deepening shades."

"This deeply felt and powerfully worded poem has a scorching sincerity. This is so because the conflict between emotional desires and physical disability was fiercely raging in him. For all his devotion to theosophy, to mysticism, to the *Upanishads*, to magic and spirituality in general, Yeats was at heart sensuous and could not reconcile himself to a life without passion. Essentially greedy of sensations, he could not make his peace with the terms of life. Fortunately for art this conflict, waged furiously or otherwise in every human breast, has been transformed into beautiful and touching poetry. Its beauty and aptness of phrase, its vivid imagery, its fine idealism and its deeply felt symbolism will give this poem a place among the best that have been written in the twentieth century."

The poem has been made beautiful and charming by the use of mythology. As Dr. B. Rajan observes, "The 'rooting of mythology in the earth' is Yeats's description of his art to Sturge Moore and his poetry exemplifies this precept, making familiar woods and rivers fade into symbol, obliterating the boundary between the legendary and the actual, mixing daylight and moonlight in one inextricable beam. The pride of the people, of Burke and Grattan, should be looked at in this way, but even the larger context does not fully define the legacy. It is, as the subsequent images make clear, an *elan* that is unattached, an effervescence of nature, the rejoicing of the life-force in itself. Eventually, it is the wisdom of the *anima mundi*, the instinct that enables the daws to build their nest outside the peep-hole of the tower, the continuity that endures through death and birth, uniting them in a single vital process. Something far deeper than snobbery is being handled on and neither snobbery nor Yeats' swagger at its most assured, could sustain the poem in its climatic cry of defiance.

"I mock Plotinus's thought
And cry in Plato's teeth
Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul
Aye, sun and moon and star, all......"

And, therefore, he takes a decision : what he proposes to do is quasi-religious and quasi-philosophical—the stuff out of which the best poetry of the world has been created. His art will have henceforth a purposiveness which was erstwhile not so obvious :

"Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school
Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come—
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath—
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades ;
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades."

Dr. B. Rajan's observations about the poem are worth noting, He writes :

"The wheel of the poem has completed its circle and insured itself against the charge of rhetoric. The seemingly arrogant claim that men makes reality is set against, and reached through the background of his madness, the massive errors that he commits in action, his humiliation by the ageing of his body. It is the counter-truth that proclaims man's dual nature, the inextricable mingling of the absurd and the heroic. The manner in which the poetry absorbs the colloquialism of 'lock, stock and barrel' is further proof of its validity ; rhetoric would be incapable of accepting such a risk. So the circuit is closed imaginatively ; Plato and Plotinus are accepted in order to be set aside ; the madness of the artist becomes the superhuman dream in which reality is mirrored.

"Faith and pride are left to plenitude of life. The 'bursting dawn', the 'dripping stone', the 'leaping fountains' and the 'headlong light' embody a vitality that must continue intact as the verse ebbs masterfully over a decrescendo of d's into a sleepy cry among deepening shades."

W. B. Yeats had thought of his home as "a setting for my old age, a place to influence lawless youth with its severity and antiquity." To him it was a symbol. He said, "I like to think of that building (Tower) as a symbol of my work, permanently visible to the passer-by." As Ellmann says, "The symbolical tower seemed likely to be attacked by unsymbolical men and weapons at any moment, and husband and wife frequently ran to the window to look out when sounds of gunfire were especially close." The Tower in this poem symbolizes "solicitude, asceticism, night and solitary intellect." The images used in the poem are those of sterility.

Thus, the central theme of *The Tower* is "the poet's reaction to his own physical infirmity wrought by Time." Although he has lost in vitality, yet has gained in powers of the mind and imagination. He asks men and women of the past about their reactions to old age. Finally, he accepts the inevitable physical degradation of old age. The poem is rather the poet's testament and his proclamation.

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WHEN YOU ARE OLD

Introduction

When You Are Old is a short lyric of twelve lines in three stanzas. It is one of those early poems which were published in 1893 under the title *The Rose*. It is addressed to Maud Gonne with whom Yeats was deeply in love. It is founded upon Ronsard's *Quand vous serez bien, vielle*. It expresses the poet's acute, heart-felt agony at the cruel, unfeeling ravages of Time.

Word-Meanings and Paraphrase

The pilgrim soul—the soul which is immortal, but which assumed different forms, and journeys from one body to another.

The glowing bars—the bars of the fireplace full of glowing coals.

Paraphrase

The poet narrates in the poem how his beloved (Maud Gonne) would grow old with the passage of time. Her liveliness and youthful energy would vanish and she would pass time sitting by the fireside as old people are wont to do. She would perhaps pick up the volume of the poet's *Collected Poems*, and slowly peruse the verses wherein the poet has avowed his love for her and admired her manifold graces and charms. She would, thus, be reminded of the loveliness of her eyes that she once possessed and of their deep shadows. It would then dawn upon her that though many loved her for her beauty and youth, there was only one and one alone whose love was sincere and genuine. The poet loved her not for her physical beauty but for her soul. It was the poet among all others who could feel for her and love her because sorrow and suffering were depicted on her face.

The study of the love-poems would set the beloved thinking wistfully of the past. She would then realize the value and significance of the poe's love. Remembering his true love, she would murmur with sorrow that he was no more. He was dead and his soul must either be wandering among the mountains or it must have become a part of the cluster of stars overhead.

A Critical Appreciation of 'When You Are Old'

When You are Old is a short lyric. It contains only twelve lines. It is a love-poem. It is addressed to poet's beloved, Maud Gonne. Based on Ronsard's sonnet *Quand vous serez bien, vielle* it is a warning to the beloved Maud Gonne. The poet giving a piece of advice asks her in the first stanza that in her old age she should take up the book and read slowly. She should dream of her youthful beauties and soft look in her eyes. There were quite a few who loved her and admired her beauty and grace, but it was the poet who loved her soul, and sorrows marked on her face. So his love was not merely sensual or physical, it was spiritual too. She is suggested to murmur slowly how the love has departed in old age and found habitation in the stars.

It is a picture of perishing youth and vanishing beauty that the lyric presents, and the poet referred to it again and again all through his career in passionate terms. Maud Gonne was proud and obstinate and the lyric is a sort of warning to her. If she does not respond to the poet's true love, a love which is not physical but spiritual in character, she would have to repent for her folly in her old age. Her youth and beauty would soon perish, the false lovers who now surround her would desert her one by one, and then she would suffer from intense remorse for her cruelty to the poet. It is therefore, better to be forewarned.

In the poem there is a delineation of Yeats's frustrated love for Maud Gonne and also of the poet's preoccupation with the Golden Dawn and the symbol of Rose The poet's sense of fear and threat has been expressed. In *When You are Old*, says Dr. B. Rajan, "the heavily monosyllabic content of the first stanza (only three out of thirty-seven words are disyllables), and the six-times-repeated use of 'and' (advice which elsewhere is a mannerism), gives the stanza its stiff, composed, deliberate movement that is both evocative of age and planned to contrast dramatically with the soaring cadence of the stanza which follows. Appreciation, however, is qualified by the knowledge that the craftsmanship, though expert, is applied ; it manipulates the poem instead of growing out of its life. Sentimentality is never far enough from the language, and even if one ignores the third stanza of *The Rose of the World* (written because Maud Gonne was tired after a long walk), there is the significant loss of tension in the third line of the first stanza, where the betrayal of the heroic by the contemporary arouses no emotion beyond distant and abstract reproof. Similarly, in *When You Are Old*, the rhetorical pressure cannot sustain the third stanza and its absence obliges one to recognize the vulnerability of the poem's content. These failures of craftsmanship to bind the poems together completely suggest that the underlying orientations are too simplified to make the craftsmanship vital. It is only necessary to compare the attitude to age in the first version of *The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner* with that in *The Tower* or *Sailing to Byzantium* to realize both the difference and its creative consequences. It was a difference which became apparent to Yeats himself, and in the totally rewritten version which appears in *Collected Poems* both the ambiguous word 'transfigures' and the irony of the refrain bring into the work some of the characteristic tensions of the later poetry."

To illustrate some of the points stated above, we quote from the poem—

> "When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
> And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
> And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
> Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep ;
>
> How many loved your moments of glad grace,
> And loved your beauty with love false or true ;
> But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
> And loved the sorrows of your changing face.
> And bending down beside the glowing bars
> Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
> And paced upon the mountains overhead
> And hid his face amid a crowd of stars."

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THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

Introduction

The Wild Swans at Coole was incorporated in the volume of the poems entitled *The Wild Swans at Coole* which came out in 1919. It was his first book of poems since the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. It shows how Yeats was not an English poet, for he remained unaffected by the violence of the Great War, although the violence of the Irish Rebellion of 1916 had affected him a lot. English poets had reacted variously to the war, but whether they welcomed it, as some did to begin with, or hated it, it was a tremendous, inescapable, collective experience. Yeats remained aloof. His elegy on Robert Gregory, mourning the man, says not a word about the war in which he died. In *An Irish Foresees His Death*, he made the following cold and measured appraisal :

> "Those that I fight I do not hate,
> Those that I guard I do not love."

This is another evidence how much unconcerned he was with the affairs of the English.

It was a period of significant events—"The First World War, the death of Hugh Lane, the Easter Rising of 1916, the threatened dismemberment of Lady Gregory's estate, the death of Maud Gonne's husband and her final rejection of Yeats, Iseult Gonne's rejection of him, his hasty marriage, the death of Robert Gregory ; all these events and others rushed pell-mell as Yeats who, at last, almost secure financially, was during these years arranging for the purchase and rehabilitation of that Ballylee Tower in which he hoped finally to settle down." All these events did not affect Yeats's creative power, and having settled in Thoor Ballylee at Coole Park, Yeats began to write best of his symbolic poetry.

The Wild Swans at Coole is a poem of nature, which portrays death, life and immortality. The poet describes his appreciation of fifty-nine swans that he had witnessed for nineteen years by the side of the lake at Coole. The poet is deeply impressed by the beauty of the swans. But everyday the number of the swans dwindles till one day the poet is grieved to find that all the swans have left the pool and have flown away to some other place to provide delight to other men's eyes. Their disappearance produces a feeling of pain in the heart of the poet.

Stanza 1

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Explanations

Autumn beauty—the trees appear beautiful in the autumn season.

Twilight—the light of the evening.

Mirrors—reflects.

A still sky—the sky is clearly reflected in the water of the lake.

Brimming water—the water of the lake is full up to the brim ; overflowing water of the lake or pool.

Paraphrase

These lines refer to the poem *The Wild Swans at Coole* written by W. B. Yeats. The poet presents the loveliness and charm of nature in October. The paths of jungle are dry and the trees appear beautiful in the autumn season. The sky is clearly reflected in the water of the pool in the pleasant light of the evening. Among the stones, near the overflowing water of the lake, the poet observes fifty-nine spotless white swans.

Stanza 2

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Explanations

The Nineteenth autumn..... me—nineteen autumns have passed since the poet first saw the swans. It means that nineteen years have passed.

Made my count—counted fifty-nine swans.

Mount—fly.

Scatter—spread.

Wheeling—moving in circles.

Clamorous—noisy.

Clamorous wings—as the swans flew high in the sky, they sang their notes.

Paraphrase

Nineteen years have passed since the poet first counted the swans suddenly mounting and scatter wheeling in great broken rings upon their clamorous wings.

Stanza 3

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Notes

Looked upon—saw.

Brilliant creatures—the white-coloured swans.

Now—when the swans have flown away.

Sore—sad and bitter.

At twilight—at the evening time.

Bill-beat—the flapping of the wings.

Trod—moved.

Lighter tread—soft speed.

Paraphrase

The poet is pained to see the dwindling ranks of the swans. Many of them have quitted the scene. Everything has undergone a change since the poet first saw them in the light of the evening by the side of the lake. They had flown away gently flapping their wings over his head.

Stanza 4

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Notes

Unwearied—untired.

Still—ever on the move.

Paddle—to move on water ; to swim.

Companionable—pleasant.

Their......old—the swans are adventurous birds and are ever eager to fly.

Conquest—desire of conquering new lands and finding new pools for their habitation.

Phraphrase

The poet points out that the swans are adventurous by nature. They are not tired of wandering and moving about in the air. They move about in the water of a lake or a pool liked by them. They also fly in the air. They are bold and adventurous and they move from one lake to another. They are dominated by the desire for movement and conquering new haunts of nature. They are after new lands and new places of conquest.

Stanza 5

Word-meanings, Paraphrase and Notes

Drift—move ; paddle on the water.

Still water—the calm and quiet water of the lakes.

Edge—brink.

Paraphrase

The poet is pained to see that the swans have flown away to other places of water, and perhaps have built their new abode among the rushes of other places of water and lakes. Perhaps they might be providing delight to some other eyes. One day the poet would know that all the swans have flown away and the lake area which they beautified by their presence, has been deserted by them.

A Critical Appreciation of 'The Wild Swans at Coole'

This poem, *The Wild Swans at Coole* was composed about 1919, rather earlier than this date, when William Butler Yeats had bought the tower of Coole Park. Though externally it was a very much disturbing time, yet Yeats was unmoved and unaffected by the external events, wars and deaths. In 1917, he married, and then had settled in the tower, Thoor Ballylee at Coole Park, with his wife. His wife had brought to him *a vision*, he was busy in developing it, and writing good symbolic poetry. In this poem, the poet remembers the beautiful, natural landscape of Coole, the swans which are withering in number ; most of them have flown to the still waters of other lakes and pools Their disappearance makes him somewhat gloomy and painful.

The poem opens with beautiful natural description :

> "The trees are in their autumn beauty,
> The woodland paths are dry,
> Under the October twilight the water
> Mirrors a still sky ;
> Upon the brimming water among the stones
> Are nine and fifty swans."

The poet has seen for nineteen years some fifty-nine swans, but all of a sudden they have started scattering away, wheeling in great broken ring upon their clamorous wings. He has looked upon those brilliant creatures with joy and pleasure, but now his heart is sore ; all is changed since then. The swans remind him of freshness and youth. Even in the cold waters they go on playing joyfully, their hearts have not grown old :

> "Unwearied still, lover by lover,
> They paddle in the cold,
> Companionable streams or climb the air ;
> Their hearts have not grown old ;
> Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
> Attend upon them still."

So the poet concludes :

> "But now they drift on the still water,
> Mysterious, beautiful ;
> Among what rushes will they build,
> By what lake's edge or pool
> Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
> To find they have flown away ?"

Predman Krishen Dhar

The poem, besides delineating a natural scene and describing the beauty of the swans, also deals with death and immortality. The swans in this poem unlike the other one (*The Coole Park and Ballylee 1931*) may not be equated with soul, but they fly from the earth to the sky, representing immortality. They unite the 'time with timeless', temporal with eternal. They are, as Dr. B. Rajan has said, symbolic of life-force, unity of transitoriness with permanence, and the poetic inspiration or imagination. The swans are vigorous and powerful. In the last stanza, the poet calls them mysterious and beautiful. He puts the question as to where they will be when he finds them some day flown away. Unterecker therefore rightly observes, "This complex question suggests its own mysteries like that of the swans, the pattern, the patterns of man survives : yet 'I' awakening some day (into death) will find the pattern of immortality 'flown away' and myself immortal." —(Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats*, p. 132).

Unterecker finds the last line baffling and mysterious. The poet after his death will find himself immortal after the disappearance of the pattern of immortality symbolized by the swans. The last line shows his awareness of reality at the birds' flight. The departure of the birds naturally should remind him of his own death and the thought of immortality.—(Unterecker, *Ibid*).

The poem begins in the tones of ordinary speech, with the 'nine and fifty' swans adding an accurately judged touch of photographic precision to a landscape which is otherwise carefully symbolic. It is a measure of Yeats's achievement that the language is held so effortlessly at this level, where the interior meaning is achieved without remoteness and the poem moves in the foreground of particularity without obscuring its hinterlands. The details accumulate and with them consciousness of autumnal mood, the 'October twilight' setting and the dry, woodland paths on which the poet walks, contrasted with the 'brimming water' on which the swans float and from which they rise in clamorous brilliance. The 'nine and fifty' now takes its place in the symbolic picture, ranging itself against the nineteen autumns, setting the details of constancy and of undying recurrence against the inexorable arithmetic of decay. The bill-beat of the swans' wings, that once brought exultation, now rings in the knowledge that a phase of life is ending ; the two lines with their finely realized fusion of heaviness and elatedness give the recognition an almost physical impact.

"It is tempting to marry these swans to other swans in other poems by Yeats, but they are meant to remain slightly mysterious and to create broken rings of meaning in the sky. In one sense, they stand for the life-force ; their hearts do not grow old, they find the streams companionable despite their coldness, passion and conquest attend them unsought, and their vigour is such that they climb the air instead of flying through it. In another sense, the swans stand for the union of time and the timeless, as the dancer symbol does in the last

of the collection. In a third sense, they stand for inspiration, building by the lake's edge where the wind blows among the reeds. The poet awakes into reality to find them gone, but perhaps the dream which they inhabit remains at his calling and perhaps the sources of life lie in the dreams of poetry. The suggestion that the power of poetry has deserted the poet is probably deferred in order to be rejected by the poem. The imagination does not age any more than the swans do. The poem is deceptively matter-of-fact, firmly rooted in the landscape of the everyday ; yet in its very unfolding, it charges itself with meaning. Symbolic speech is not simply professed but possessed."
—(B. Rajan).

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q. 1. Write a note on the evolution of Yeats's genius.

Or

Write a short essay on the growth and development of Yeats's art and poetry.

Or

Attempt at a comparative estimate of various phases of Yeats's poetry.

Or

"No poet, not even the greatest, has shown a longer period of development than Yeats." Discuss.

Ans. It was on the occasion of Yeats's 70th birthday that T. S. Eliot remarked, "I can think of no poet, not even the greatest, who has shown a longer period of development than Yeats. Development to this extent is not merely genius, it is character." Yeats enjoyed a long creative span—much longer than any other romantic or modern poet. During all this period of his creativity, his art and genius were constantly maturing and developing.

From the viewpoint of study, his whole poetic career can be divided into three phases. The *first* period is full of the themes related to stories and legends of Ireland. The folk-culture in which Yeats was steeped was simple. In the earliest phase, he was influenced by Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites. But the other worldliness in the poems of this period came from the Celtic legends. Most of his lyrics of this period are dreamy, romantic and imaginative. Yeats of this phase, to quote C. M. Bowra's observation, "is a good pupil of William Morris, a poet of escape, singer of music in the deep heart's core." Yeats's early poems are in the nature of the Victorian tradition which itself was the continuation of the tendencies of the Romantic Revival. There is simplicity in these early poems. He also traffics with ghosts, sorcerers and fairies. According to J. W. Beach, "The earlier poems are remarkable for their dreamy sweetness and their traditional song-like ballad rhythm, whether they are in ordinary iambics,......or in the more haunting, curiously modulated cadence... Very little of common life is admitted ; the vocabulary is rather strictly limited to what would suit the general tonality of late-Victorian romanticism, and further limited in the effort to give the effect of Irish folk-literature."

As pointed out by John Davidson, there was in Yeats too much "blood and guts" for him to remain satisfied for long with the poetry of the kind of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree.* Consequently, he could not remain a poet of the Celtic Twilight. The *second* phase is represented by *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1889) and *The Shadowy Waters* (1900). In these, "he is making," says Pinto, "the voyage within, withdrawing as much as possible from the contemporary world and enriching his inner life by concentrating on purely visionary themes." Symbolism was the religion that purified and intensified Yeats's inner life. The high priest of the "Great French Symbolist Movement was Mallarme." But Mallarme came to Yeats through the translations of Symons. "Mallarme's religion was an austere worship of absolute beauty, which was to be reached by the rapt contemplation of symbols. His poetry is a poetry of suggestion from which all prosaic elements are banished." As Dr. Bowra has written, "All preliminaries, explanations, comparisons are omitted and the gain in concentration is enormous. The poetry is fully packed. It has some of the direct appeal of music." Yeats took the conception of 'pure' poetry from Mallarme. In his essay on 'The Symbolism of Poetry,' he called for a return to the way of our fathers, a casting out of descriptions of nature for the sake of nature, of the moral law for the sake of the moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of that brooding over scientific opinion that so often extinguished the central flame in Tennyson. He wanted to introduce those forceful rhythms, meditative wavering, organic, which issue forths from the imagination. His poetry was to be composed of "words..... as subtle, as complex, as full of mysterious life, as the body of a flower or a woman."

In his symbolic poems, Yeats uses the images of Celtic mythology, more precisely than Mallarme's with richer associations. In the poem, *The Wind among the Reeds*, the ancient Irish myths are used to express the poet's own state of mind, whereas in the earlier poems, they are used simply as stories. In some of the poems—*The Cap and the Bells* is one—the symbols have no precise meaning, but they exist by virtue of their own intensity. No intellectual meaning, for example, can be attached to the jester who sends his soul in the shape of "a straight blue garment" to the young queen. Yeats's symbolism is also associated with a belief in occult influences of magic.

But the most ambitious and elaborate symbolism is employed in the dramatic poem *The Shadowy Waters*. Undramatic essentially, it is "a magnificent lyric in dialogue where all the characters speak with the voice of the poet." The poem is a great hymn to the romantic conception of a love that is humanly unintelligible. The last lines have the richest musical expression of this deal of romantic love. *The Shadowy Waters* is the culmination of Yeats's symbolist poetry. *In the Seven Woods* is also a symbolic work : but in one poem, a new note of sharp satire and realism is struck :

> "Better go down upon your marrow bones
> And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
> Like an old pauper in all kinds of weather,
> For to articulate sweet sounds together,
> Is to work harder than all these..."

At the end of *In the Seven Woods*, there is the remarkable poem, 'The Happy Townland', which may be taken as Yeats's farewell to symbolism. Instead of the vague and misty manner of his previous work, the world of the Irish myth of faery world of ideal happiness is painted in sharp, brilliant colours and concrete forms. "This poem is a turning-point in Yeats's development. He had made the voyage within and had discovered the beauty of the Inner Life, but he had also discovered that it was a terrible inhuman beauty, 'The world's bane'. This discovery made him the 'master and not the servant of the terror'."

So in his later poetry, Yeats cultivates subtler, more varied and more dramatically balanced cadences, his vocabulary is greatly enlarged with terms both vernacular and learned. The metaphors are fresher and taken from a vastly under-range of references, and the imaginative structure is both firmly wrought and more spontaneous and natural in effect. The "metaphysical" has come back, with its artful dissonances and its composition of contrasting tonalities. And the final effect is an enrichment of the early "glamour" with the help of the familiar and the difficult. In all this, Yeats has been a leader in that school of writing which includes such names as Eliot, Auden, Ransom, Steves, Ronal Battrall and Dylan Thomas. His later style begins to show strongly in the 1910 volumes in such poems as "No Second Troy", "The Fascination of What's Difficult", "The Cold Heaven," etc. In 1919, he has completely found his voice as a poet in whom feeling is penetrated with thought and the imagination is rooted in experience and enriched by reference to a considerable range of assimilated knowledge.—(J. W. Beach).

In the *third* period, Yeats made the voyage without, just as in the second he made the voyage within. Now his old view—"then no wise worship dusty deeds" began to be obsolete. He had begun to realize the wisdom of Synge's approach to life and literature. Yeats writes in *Discoveries* about this time : "What moves natural man in the arts is what moves them in life." Then he goes on to say "Art, bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrink from what Blake calls mathematical form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a foundation getting from the entire hopes, memories and sensations of the body." The new recognition of the body came to him under the influence of Synge. Synge's "harsh, heroical, clean, wind-swept view of the things" provided the stimulus that was needed by a poet who had grown weary of romantic idealism and the inhumanity of the symbolist doctrine. As a result, the Yeats of 'white beauty', 'pearl-pale hands' and 'cloud-pale eyelids' became the Yeats of men and women and the reality around him.

For the first six years of the 20th century, Yeats worked hard at writing plays for the Abbey Theatre. It was through these plays that Yeats tried to create a new 'unity of life' for the whole Irish nation based on their traditional heroic legends. The best of them are the two fine tragedies, *On Baile's Strand* (1904) and *Deirdre* (1906). Even in his dramas, there is a subjective and lyrical element.

All his schemes and plans before the First World War had met with failure. Synge had died; the Abbey Theatre had changed its outlook under the management of Lennox Robinson and had begun to produce realistic plays. Most of Yeats's contemporaries thought that his career was at an end. But the most important phase of his writing was only just beginning. "Like Dante and Milton, he only started to write his greatest poetry when all his projects in the sphere of action had ended in complete disaster."

The new Yeats is visible in the poems published with *The Green Helmet*. But *Responsibilities* (1914) is another milestone in the evolution of Yeats's poetry. "From these poems the romantic decoration, the mythology and the vague incantatory music of his earlier works have been almost entirely banished. In their place there is terse, unadorned language and rhythms of an almost Wordsworthian simplicity." But the real period of fruition can be seen in the poems published immediately after the First World War—*The Wild Swans at Coole* (*1919*), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), and *The Winding Stair* (1933).

Yeats had been reading, during these years, philosophical views of Plato, Plotinus, Hegel, Croce, Whitehead and the idealism of George Berkeley, the Irish Bishop of 18th century. He worked out an elaborate, occult system of philosophy in A *Vision* (1925), yet whenever he made an attempt at introducing the inhuman and abstract system of determinism in poetry (for example in *The Phases of the Moon* and *The Double Vision of Michael Robartes*), he did not succeed much. Later on, Yeats himself criticized *A Vision*. Nevertheless the system did provide him with "a background which illuminates the dynamic myths of his maturity with a visionary radiance."

The vague figures of the Celtic legend and the tragic heroes of 1916 are replaced by the great men of Protestant 18th century Ireland —Swift, Berkeley, Goldsmith and Burke, Lionel Johnson, and Synge. "Yeats remained a symbolist in his later poetry but he now moved to a far wider and deeper conception of symbolism, which was his interpretation of Platonic idealism particularly in the form in which it was restated by Berkeley. He now saw the whole material world as a symbolic dramatization of eternity and he was free to choose his symbol from the whole range of his reading and personal experience." The Byzantine poems of this period are by and large most famous and most philosophical poems. "This is poetry," says Pinto, "in which the outer and the inner lives are brought together in a unity which includes realism, wit, lyrical beauty and philosophic meditation." It is not a synthesis in which we feel a sense of terrible effort and strain as we do in much of the best work of Hopkins, but it seems to arise easily and naturally from the poet's mind :

"As the leaves grow on the tree."

There is a corresponding maturing of art and technique. The poet is at the height of his powers, has acquired full control over his material, moves with perfect ease from one dissimilar concept to another. Glittering, sonorous epithets are now used alternately with choppy words conveying an impression of the stresses and rhythms of the reality of the present as well as the mystery and richness of the past.

The poetry of the *last* period covers the poems written within a few years of the poet's death and published under the title of the *Last Plays and Poems*. The impression which these poems create is not one of fulfilment and harmony. The tone is intensely tragic, and the ironic, defiant gaiety is only a mask to cover disappointments and frustrations. Yeats is humorous, even boisterously humorous; he is defiantly ironical. But all his irony, his gaiety, his banter is merely a sign of the intensity of his suffering. But he does not loose his frenzy; he has full command over his material, and he is conscious of his own isolation when he writes :

> "But I grow old among dreams,
> A weather-worn, marble Triton,
> Among the streams."

Thus, the entire poetic production of Yeats is marked with limpid and languorous ease. The verse bears the qualities of the Irish national character—moody, showy, and dreamy. His artistry is unchallenged. His melody and music, the singing quality in his poetry, rings through all his poems. Yeats, above all, is a singer, and the flow of his lines, particularly in his lyrics, is limpid, enthralling and captivating.

His artistry is something which impresses all his readers. "From the first, Yeats was an accomplished poetic artist, though his mastery of language and rhythm grew steadily throughout his career. From the Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism of his early verse, with its quest for beauty, its conscious, often sentimental simplicity, and its languid, melodic grace, he developed a more direct and virile expression. There is the same delicacy of workmanship, and the gorgeous phrase still flashes among the everyday language and personal direct expression of his maturity."—(E. Albert).

Q. 2. Discuss W. B. Yeats as a representative poet of Ireland.

Or

Why is W. B. Yeats called the poet of the 'Celtic Twilight' ?

Or

"Yeats's poetry is rooted in the English tradition."—"Yeats is a great national poet of Ireland." Reconcile the two remarks.

Ans. Yeats has been rightly called the National and Nationalistic poet of Ireland as well as the poet of 'Celtic Twilight'. In fact, "Ireland meant to Yeats something very specialized. It is not Ireland as the ordinary person knows it, yet it is something distilled from that Ireland. It may be largely a dream but it is truer than many conceptions of Ireland held by both Irishmen and Englishmen—than the Ireland of the popular stage and the popular song or than the Ireland of most politicians, whose vision, as Yeats would have said, is distorted by abstractions." (Louis Macneice). By birth and temperament, by the accident of his upbringing and also by deliberate choice, Yeats was the poet of Irish tradition. He has exploited to the full Saga of Ireland and the Celtic legends. His poems like *Fergus and the Druid, Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea, The Song of Wandering Aengus, An Irish Airman Foresees His Death, Easter 1916* and a number of others are based on Irish mythology and Irish politics.

Yeats's love for and interest in Irish nationalism was fostered and fanned by his ancestry (his father was a nationalist), the contemporary Irish political scene, O'Leary, Maud Gonne, besides the inherent and temperamental liking for the glorious past of Ireland and deep concern for its future.

Yeats was deeply influenced by O'Leary's sacrifices and achievements. It was he who stirred in Yeats 'the desire of intellectual leadership in Ireland'. About his indebtedness to O'Leary, Yeats himself writes, "It was through the old Fenian leader John O'Leary I found my theme. His long imprisonment, his longer banishment, his magnificent head, his scholarship, his pride, his integrity, all that aristocratic dream nourished amid little shops and little farms, had drawn around him a group of young men......He gave me the poems of Thomas Davis, said they were not good poetry but had changed his life when a young man, spoke of other poets......" Yeats contributed Irish ballads to O'Leary's news-paper, *The Gael*. He became a nationalist and visited the Nationalists' houses in Dublin. Yeats also got into active contact with a patriotic society which O'Leary was connected. With one T. W. Rolleston, O'Leary founded 'The Irish Literary Society of London' in December 1891 and the 'National Literary Society in Dublin' in May 1892. The immediate object was to publicize the literature, folklore and legends of Ireland. Yeats joined this National Society and offered to send a travelling theatre to organize shows on Irish themes.

Maud Gonne, whom Yeats loved very dearly, was an important factor in initiating Yeats into active politics. After Maud Gonne's fiery speech in 1897, both she and Yeats resigned from the Irish Republican Brotherhood. After a bit of disillusionment, Yeats started forming societies to popularize and propagate the Irish literature which was created in English. The political nationalism was thus transformed into literary nationalism. During this period, Yeats also came in contact with Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge. These two restored to him the Ireland of his childhood.

Yeats's interest in Irish Nationalism was primarily literary. He soon turned from Irish politics to Irish literature. He himself wrote, "Meanwhile I had begun a movement in English, in the language in which modern Ireland thinks and does its business ; founded certain societies where clerks, working men, men of all classes, could study the Irish poets, novelists and historians who had been translated into English but the great mass of our people, accustomed to interminable political speeches, read little, and so from the very start, we felt that we must have a theatre of our own." Thus was founded Irish Literary Theatre to which Yeats contributed his plays. Irish Literary Theatre had Yeats, Martyn and Moore as its directors. Later on the Abbey Theatre was started with Yeats and Lady Gregory as its directors.

The Irish have contempt for England. Yeats was always conscious that the English were foreigners, or that he was a foreigner among the English. With other Irish patriots hatred for England was a great obsession. Yeats at many a time, whether sincerely or out of oratory, echoes such sentiments. At a centenary celebration of Wolfe Tone he said, "We hated at first the ideals and ambitions of England, the materialism of England, because they were here, but we have come to hate them with a nobler hatred. We hate them now because they are evil. We have suffered too long from them, not to understand, that hurry to become rich, that delight in mere bigness, that insolence to the weak are evil and vulgar things......We are building up a nation which shall be moved by noble purpose and to noble ends". But gradually Yeats gave up his hatred for England. Torn in a love-hatred dilemma for England he wrote : "Then I remind myself that though mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English, and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, I speak, and write that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate."

In fact, Yeats did not have any inherent hatred for England. Rather his poetry is rooted in Englsh tradition. No doubt, it was as an Irish poet in the English language that Yeats aspired to become known. He knew no national language of Ireland, Gaelic; that is why he wrote in English. He said, "I could no more have written Gaelic than can those Indians write in English ; Gaelic is my national language, but it is not my mother-tongue." Although Yeats was an Irish poet, he was also a Cosmopolitan. As a pure artist he dreamt of an integrated vision of Europe, for there had been ages when the consciousness of Europe was integrated; all men could draw on a collective understanding because all understood the same images, though not at the same depth. Yeats was convinced that religion and politics could not create great and pure poetry. It was the notion of cultural unity that could help a poet. In the words of A. G. Stock, "A writer of talent turned naturally to England both for his public and his model. Yeats's idea of Ireland required a national literature.

He wanted Irish writers to be conscious of a past; he wanted the native legends and folklore to be widely enough known to be the medium of their image—thinking which is the wisdom of poetry and the language of a national mind." The words of Ellmann Richard are equally significant : "Yeat's Irishness is of a special kind. Like Joyce's prose, his poetry makes use of national and local borders only to transcend them. He is Irish; he is also anti-Irish in an Irish way......His method of treating his Irish background and subject matter is, therefore, exceedingly complex. Ireland is a symbol for the world, and he is caught between estrangement and love for both."

Hence, it may well be stated that the nationalism of Yeats is not of a rebel or a narrow-minded politician; it is very much literary. He believed that literature held an important place in the regeneration of a nation. He sang only "to sweeten Ireland's wrong". He may be regarded as the pivot around which Irish literature turned from instinctive to conscious art. We may conclude with the words of Macneice, "In reviving Irish literature, he revived himself, was saved from spending his time in the adulteration of foreign wines. He may at times have distorted the meaning of Ireland, but it was Ireland that gave body to his poetry. His escape from England coincided with his escape from adolescence. His adolescent poetry is his English poetry. His early poems still show the undue influence of Keats, Shelley and Morris."

Q. 3. What are Yeats's major themes ?

Or

Trace out the development of Yeats's major themes.

Ans. Yeats's poetic career shows tremendous development of his art and genius. In his early poetry, the poet is an escapist and romantic. He has been influenced by Shelley, Keats and the Pre-Raphaelite poets. He is airy, abstract and introspective. His goal is spiritual conquest. There is much poetry of escape and romantic longing, although there is some poetry about earth. Yet the main thing is the dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical, escape and involvement. In his last two phases of poetry, the poet comes closer to life and earth, but the celebration of the physical world is never at the expense of the visionary goal. The mortal world is never independent for him. The fusion between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the superhuman is always there in Yeats's poetry. But there is a remarkable shift from the goal of the spiritual quest to the quest itself. Though the quest fails, though the resolution is false, yet in the brave struggle for achieving harmony, the poet crosses the borders of destructive despair and exalts himself to heroism. This is called the defiant gaiety in his poetry. Even in bitterness and tragedy, he is not a dead pessimist because he believes—

"All things fall and are built again
All those that build them again are gay."

According to an Indian critic, Yeats's early poetry is mainly escapist. The two trends, however, can be easily traced out in his early poetry—his romantic longing and his nationalist urge to revive the Celtic past. His attitude in his later poetry is harsh and bitter. It is complex too. His frustration in love and his bitter experiences in politics shattered his beliefs and produced this harsh, sardonic tone. Whereas the former note can be easily seen in a poem like *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, the latter one is reflected in the poems of the collection entitled *The Tower* and also of *The Winding Stair*. The last phase shows a complexity of moods and tones. It speaks of the completion of a pattern into which many different threads have been woven, but the prevailing impression is not one of harmony and fulfilment. The tone is intensely tragic and the defiant gaiety is only a mask worn in disappointment. The most civilized way of being sad is to be humorous. Yeats is not simply humorous ; he is buoyant and ironical.

Yeats's poetry has many themes—Ireland, its glorious past and its heroes, its political scene in the contemporary times—the Easter Rebellion, and the Irish Nationalist Movement ; personal friends and past recollections ; love and women-friends ; politics and religion ; angels, fairies, ghosts and devils ; legends and superstitions ; soul and its various states ; and also some Indian themes under the spell of Hindu thought, cast over him by the Brahmin Mohini Chatterjee, art and aristocracy.

Ireland is the major theme of his poetry. Ireland is always in the poet's mind. He wanted to make Ireland a heaven though he failed. He has exploited to the full the Saga of Ireland and the Celtic legends. His poems like *Fergus and the Druid*, *Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea*, *The Song of Wandering Aengus*, *An Irish Airman foresees his Death*, *Easter 1916* and others are based on Irish mythology and the Irish politics. "It was an Irish poet that he aspired to become known, and now that he is dead the category seems more fully established and distinguished from the state of being an English poet."—(Richard Ellmann). Although Yeats was an Irish poet, yet he was also a cosmopolitan And he transcended Irishness, though remaining an Irishman. "When he wrote *A Vision* he forgot he was an Irishman. And while he calls the fairies by their Irish name of Sidhe, I suspect that they too are internationalists. His later versions of preternatural beings are except in the play *The Dreaming of the Bones*, indifferent to race although they retain their interest in families and individuals. Irishness is an essential quality, but a secondary one." So, though he was provincial he could also be a cosmopolitan. "Yeats's Irishness is of a special kind. Like Joyce's prose, his poetry makes use of national and local borders only to transcend them. He is Irish ; he is also anti-Irish in an Irish way, and his interest in Irishmen is always subordinated to an interest in men His method of treating his Irish background and subject-matter is, therefore, exceedingly complex. Ireland is his symbol for the world, and he is caught between estrangement and love for both."—(Ellmann).

Another major theme of Yeats is occultism. Yeats is a follower of occult tradition or the Platonic tradition. The case for occultism is simple and tempting. He, undoubtedly, had a lifelong interest in the subject beginning with Theosophy in the eighties, continuing with magical invocation in the 'nineties and proceeding to spiritualism and automatic writing in later life. Yeats wrote to John O'Leary that occultism to which he gave the wider name of 'the mystical life' was the centre of his work, and bore to it the same relation that Godwin's philosophy held to the work of Shelley. Yeats found in occultism and in mysticism generally a point of view which had a virtue of warring with accepted beliefs, and of warring enthusiastically and authoritatively. Yeats wanted to prove by occultism that science was limited in its results. He wanted to convince that an ideal world existed. He also wanted to show that the current faith in reason and in logic ignored a far more important human faculty, the imagination.

The third major theme of Yeats is love which most of the time revolves round Maud Gonne. His love-poems echo his bitterness and frustration. He feels that Maud Gonne rejected him because of intellectual bigotry, and says that all beautiful women eat something silly and are the cause of great miseries to the individuals as well as to the world in general.

Another group contains poems which are metaphysical in their tone and in which the conditions of soul are touched upon through various symbols, persons and events. Such poems are collected in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*. At last, in the last poems, he clings to the earth : "To follow the soul into another world is to give up one's heart and self, and worst of all for a poet, to give up one's tongue, for in the presence of that unblemished world our tongue's stone, in the simplicity of fire we are struck dumb. The poet is committed to this world by his profession as well as by his temperament." How could he leave this world in which lived his sweetheart Maud Gonne. He had passion and lust for life. Hence, the conflict between the physical and the spiritual world is another major theme of Yeats's poetry. It is because of this conflict that he tries to express his views through opposites like those of Blake.

Q. 4. Discuss W. B. Yeats as 'a last romantic'.

Ans. Romanticism is 'the affirmation of Wonder'. According to Cazamian, it is "the affirmation of an innovatory aesthetic creed as opposed to an orthodox art." Victor Hugo calls romanticism 'liberalist in literature'. C. M. Bowra confirms this view when he says, "Imagination is supreme in the romantic poetry." Pater suggests that romanticism is 'addition of strangeness to beauty.' The romantic poets sing generally of,

> "......old unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago"

or of,

> "Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn"

or of,

> "A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon—lover !"

W. B. Yeats, indeed, began as a romanticist. In his poem, *Coole Park and Ballylee*, 1931, Yeats writes :

> "We were the last romantics......chose for theme
> Traditional sanctity and loveliness ;
> Whatever's written in what poets name
> The book of the people whatever most can bless
> The mind of man or elevate a rhyme,
> But all is changed that high horse riderless.
> Though mounted in the saddle Homer rode
> Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood."

Fundamentally of course, Yeats is a romantic poet. "My life is my poem," says Yeats in his *Autobiography*. Yeats had a great gift for both feeling and inspiring romantic love. In the Ireland of his time he found many beautiful women to break his heart. That is why he writes many poems inspired by women, especially Maud Gonne, Iseult Gonne and Olivia Shakespeare. He refers to Iseult in *To a Young Beauty* and *Long-legged Fly*.

> "She is one part woman, three parts a child."

Into a Young Girl he writes about her,

> "My dear, my dear, I know
> More than another
> What makes your heart beat so."

And he writes in the same poem about her mother, Maud Gonne :

> "Not even your own mother
> Can know it as I know
> Who broke my heart for her
> When the wild thought,
> That she denies
> And has forgot
> Set all her blood astir
> And glittering in her eyes."

He sings of Maud Gonne both in his plays and poems. *The Wanderings of Oisin, The Countess Cathleen, A Bronze Head, A Prayer for my Daughter, The Circus Animals' Deserion* and in several other poems, the main theme is love and its loveliness. In his early poems, like *The Lake Isle of Innisfree, The Stolen Child, The Sad Shepherd, The Pity of Love, The Sorrow of Love* and many others he is abundantly sentimental and romantic and is immensely influenced by Shakespeare, Spenser, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson and Morris. He had begun as a dreamy romantic, seeking in a beautiful world of words compensation for the drabness of a world in which science had killed traditional values. The tone of his early poems is languid and nostalgic, and he wants to escape into a dreamy land away from the harsh realities of life.

> "The woods of Arcady are dead
> And over is their antique joy
> But O sick children of the world
> Of all the many changing things
> In dreamy dancing past us whirled
> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings
> Words alone are certain good."

There are several qualities of romanticism which find an expression in the poetry of W. B. Yeats. Escapism, melancholy (bitterness), subjectivity, love of beauty, antiquity (especially the middle ages), individual ego, lyricism, love of nature, passion and sentiment, pictorial quality, etc., are the primary characteristics of romantic poetry. And these characteristics are reflected abundantly in Yeats's poetry, especially in his early poetry. The mystic vision which is so common with most of the romantic poets is also an essential part of Yeats's poetry. His diction and style, too, are also in line with most of the romantics. Even the pictorial quality which was so profusely followed by the early romanticists and the poets of the Pre-Raphaelite School of Poetry is a mark of Yeats's poetry. The poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites was continuation of the romantic poetry, and Yeats began his poetic career as a last romantic.

To a great extent, Yeats was an escapist all through his life. An avowed enemy of science, he repudiated general knowledge, world ideals, internationalism. "Yeats's limitations may have prevented writing the greatest kind of poetry but they enabled him to write perhaps the best poetry of his time......the normal poets—witnessed the Elizabethan, should not be afraid of touching pitch. But the pitch is so thick on the world thoroughfare nowadays that a poet needs exceptionl strength not to stick in it. Yeats avoided the world thoroughfare. It would be a disaster if all poets were to imitate him." He distrusted the questioning spirit of the so-called intellectualism and believed that "poets must not meddle with opinions; it should never be forgotten that poetry is the voice of the solitary spirit, prose the language of the sociable-minded. He was in all things a Pre-Raphaelite and violently opposed to the new realism imported from the art schools of Paris. He came under the influence of Pater and Oscar Wilde who held that life is irrelevant to Art and that the principles of Art must be carried into life. Pater supplied with a belief in the importahce of passion of style and a distrust of the vulgar and a strange sort of aesthetic pantheism, a make-believe homage to material objects which professes to discount their materiality. Pater inspired Yeats to elevate the mood into a kind of Platoniform. But the truth is that he was not a pure escapist. He himself criticized *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* and said that he would not write in that manner any longer and then the realistic note was more and more progressively heard in his poetry. But Macneice writes : "Many people, however, exaggerate Yeat's escapism ? He was neither so simple-minded nor so esoteric nor so dilettante a poet as he is often represented. I have met people whose attitude is, 'Yeats was a silly old thing but he was a poet.' This is a foolish attitude. The silly old thing can write poetry. A poet cannot live by style alone ; nor even by intuitions alone. Yeats, contrary to some people's opinion, had a mind. He had also extraordinary force of personality. It is impossible to explain him by merely murmuring about Beauty."

Yeats's love of antiquity, of past, of ancient mythology is a tendency which the Romantics adopted lovingly, and this is known as medievalism. Yeats's early poetry is not free from this tendency. He was a great singer. He wrote 'ballads and lyrics about the past and the present and the future of Ireland which were meant, not to be printed and read, but to be spoken, to be sung.' Some of these songs are in the nature of a sigh. "He was like Lancelot who nearly saw the Grael. He believed in the Grael, divining its presence (to use Plato's metaphor), he made great effort to achieve vision."

Escapism is clearly reflected in Byzantium poems and a passage like the following :

"I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and whattles made :
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow ;
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the
cricket sings." —*The Lake Isle of Innisfree.*

Melancholy and bitterness and tendency of escapism can be very well seen in his Byzantium and Crazy Jane poems. In Crazy Jane poems, we can also see his sentimentality. The following passages may well illustrate this point :

"I have not a crumb of comfort, not a grain,
Time can but make her beauty over again :

× × ×

O heart ! O heart ! if she'd but turn her head,
You'd know the folly of being comforted."
—*The Folly of Being Comforted.*

"No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind ;
The boughs have withered because I have told them my
dreams." —*The Wuthering of the Boughs.*

"The lyrical and musical note, another characteristic of Romantic poetry, can be seen in the following passages :—

> "Down by the Salley gardens my love and I did meet ;
> She passed the Salley gardens with little snow-white feet."
> —*Down by the Salley Gardens.*
>
> "The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
> The wind blows over the levels of heart,
> And the levels of heart is withered away."
> —*The Land of Heart's Desire*
>
> "Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruished to pleasure soul,
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
> Nor clear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
> O chestnut tree, great roofed blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the hole ?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance."
> —*Among School Children.*

These passages also give us an evidence of Yeats's love of Nature. Yeats may not love Nature in the Wordsworthian sense, but he draws heavily from Nature material for his imagery. The heaven to which he wants an escape from this sordid world of grim realities, and unattained love too is with a tree on which will sing a golden bird. Graham Hugh authentically includes Yeats in his discussion entitled *The Last Romantics*. No doubt, Yeats began as a belated romantic and Pre-Raphaelite, but later he became a classicist. He afterwards decided :

> "You must draw heaven and earth into your net."

Romantic love, the romantic view of death, the romantic view of the poet, the private self-made philosophy of the romantic poet—these are all basic elements of Yeats's mind as it manifests itself in his lyrics. Even when he sees and understands much more than the romantic poet, the lurid glow of romanticism nevertheless hangs over the scene. And very often it is pure romantic perception, the consequence of all the romantic assumptions, that we find in poems which, considered as verbal expressions are faultless. In the words of G. S. Frazer, "He was the last of the great romantics ; but because his life as a poet was so much longer than of Keats or Shelley and so much more complex and passionate and interesting than that of Wordsworth, it seems to me that there is a humanity, a solidity, a coherence, a constant awareness of the demands of decorum and style, in his work, which one does not find in theirs."

"Yeats," observes Richard Ellmann, "is a romantic, but with compunctions. He admires imagination and individualism and excess and the golden future as much as Blake did." In a sense, Yeats is neither a pure romantic nor a pure classicist. He is a synthesis of the two. His attitude is neither orthodox-religious, in the sense in which both Eliot and Auden are now orthodox-religious, nor orthodox-scientific, or will be scientific in the sense of the young radical Marxist and Freudian poets of 1930's. He mingles together magic, mythology, beauty, religion, philosophy and science. Masks and symbols are also a distinguished feature of his later poetry. He is unexpectedly interested in determinism, he insists on stateliness, courtliness, control and orderliness as criterion for judging the past, present, and the future. His nature is not Wordsworthian, his heroes are not Byronic, and his emotional exposition is not Shelleyan. His outlook, says Hulme, is close at points to Classicism. Prof. Pinto has rightly remarked in this connection : "Yeats began as a late Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite with the additional advantage of contact with Irish mythological, traditional and folk-culture. What is remarkable about his whole career is his sustained power of development. He could not remain a poet of the Celtic Twilight. In the second phase of his work represented by *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1889) and *The Shadowy Waters* (1890), he is making the voyage within, withdrawing as much as possible from the contemporary world and enriching his inner life by concentrating on purely visionary themes.

Q. 5. Write an essay on the distinctive characteristics of modern poetry, illustrating your remarks from the poems of Yeats.

Or

Attempt a short essay on "The Modernity" of W. B. Yeats.

Ans. "When the twentieth century opened," writes A. C. Ward, "Tennyson had been dead nine years, and there was a widespread impression that English poetry had died with him." To the critics of the early 20th century, it seemed that the glorious days of the English poetic muse were over and what was to follow was going to be puerile, wayward, and obscure. A. C. Ward added further, "The poetry of the period shows a distinct decline, not in the general level of execution but in genius and breadth of range." Yet modern poetry has offered a rich harvest and a great variety of poetical forms. In the modern age, there "has been no dearth of great poets or great poems that will stand the test of time and become a part of the imperishable literary heritage of England."

The main features of modern poetry can be summarized in the following way :

1. Astounding Variety

Poetry of today can be written on almost any subject. The modern poet finds inspiration from railway trains, cars, telephones, snake-charmers, and flies and fleas. The whole universe is the modern poet's experience. He writes on themes of real life and also makes excursion in the world of religion, mysticism and fairyland. This is true of Yeats also. He writes of a great variety of things, especially friends, his love, his personal memories and experiences, Ireland and its politics, great people of past, ancient mythology, history and politics. *Long-legged Fly*, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, *Byzantium* have a lot of realistic suggestibility in their titles.

2. Humanitarian and Democratic Note

Modern poetry is marked with a note of humanitarianism and democratic feeling. The modern poet, more than Wordsworth, is interested in the life of the common man. Masefield, Gibson, and a number of other poets have depicted in their poetry the sufferings of the common and the poor. Masefield as a representative voice says :

> "Others may sing of the wealth and the mirth,
> The portly presence of potentates goodly in girth,
> Mine be the dirt and the dross, the dust and scum of the earth."

This democratic note can be easily traced from Yeats's nationalistic poems and a poem entitled *Running to Paradise* :

> "As I came over Windy Gap
> They threw a halfpenny into my cap,
> For I am running to paradise ;
> And all that I need do is to wish
> And somebody puts his hand in the dish
> To throw me a bit of salted fish :
> And there the king is but as the beggar.
>
> × × ×
>
> Poor men have grown to be rich men,
> And rich men grown to be poor again,
> And I am running to Paradise ;
> And many a darling wit's grown dull
> That tossed a bare heel when at school,
> Now it has filled an old sock full :
> And there the king is but as the beggar."

3. Realism

Modern poetry is marked with a note of realism. Realism in modern poetry was the product of a reaction against the pseudo-romanticism of the last century over and above the influence of Science. The modern poet sees life and paints it as it is with all its warts and ugliness. Robert Frost, Edmund Blunden, W. W. Gibson, John Masefield are the poets of realism. Early poetry of W. B. Yeats, however, is not realistic ; it is of dreamland and fairyland. But his later poetry, and especially of the last two phases is markedly realistc. *The Wild Swans at Coole*, *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*, *The Tower*, and *The Winding Stair* are the poems full of realism. Here is a stanza from *The Stare's Nest by My Window* :

> "The bees build in the crevices
> Of loosening masonry, and there
> The mother birds bring grubs and flies.

My wall is loosening ; honey-bees.
Come build in the empty house of the stare."

4. Romantic Element in Modern Poetry

In spite of the preponderance of realism in modern poetry, the spirit of romance continues to sway the minds of certain poets like Walter De La Mare, James Elroy Flecker, W. B. Yeats, John Masefield, Edward Thomas. The works of these poets prove the fact that the spirit of romance is as old as life itself. Walter De La Mare's poetry sustained with the true romantic spirit bordering on supernaturalism. W. B. Yeats is indeed the last romantic. Despite his realistic diction and an effort to bring his poetry to the earth, he believes in ghosts and fairies, magic and the mysterious world.

5. Pessimistic Note in Modern Poetry

There is a note of pessimism and disillusionment in modern poetry. The modern poet has realized the pettiness of human life, and the tragedy and suffering of the down-trodden people have made him gloomy and leaden-eyed. Poetry, as the expression of this feeling, has become autumnal in tone. Housman, Hardy, Huxley, Eliot and Yeats all are the poets of pessimism and disillusionment. They are dissatisfied sometime with the world and sometime with God. Yeats's poetry after his frustration with Maud Gonne and her rejection of him, and his disenchantment with the Irish National Movement is full of pessimism, bitterness and dejection, but he tries to sing away this dejection through philosophical musings. Most of his love poems are full of this note. For example, *To a Shade*, *When Helen Lived*, the poems of the collection entitled *The Tower*, *The Winding Stair* and the *Byzantium* poems reflect this mood. Ahead are lines from Yeats's *Lines Written in Dejection* :

"When have I last looked on
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies
Of the dark leopards of the moon ?
All that wild witches, those most noble ladies,
For all their broom-sticks and their tears,
Their angry tears, are gone.
The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished ;
I have nothing but the embittered sun ;
Banished heroic mother moon had vanished,
And now that I have come to fifty years
I must endure the timid sun."

6. Religion and Mysticism

Although the modern age is essentially a scientific age, yet modern poetry, by and large, has been indulging in religion and mysticism. Francis Thomson, Robert Graves, G. K. Chesterton, Belloc, Charlotte Mew, W. B. Yeats, George Russell and T. S. Eliot are the major poets who have kept the flame of religion and mysticism burning in their poetry. The last poems of Yeats are very much mystical and philosophical. *A Dialogue of Self and Soul* is in a broader sense a debate between 'Atma' and 'Maya'. Soul says :

"I summon to the winding ancient stair :
Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
Upon the star that marks the hidden pole ;
Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is done ;
Who can distinguish darkness from the soul ?"

Or, the following passage from *Sailing to Byzantium* :

"O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away ; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is ; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity."

7. Love in Modern Poetry

Love forms the subject of many modern lyrics. Robert Bridges has produced fine sonnets of love in *The Growth of Love.* His poems, *Awake My Heart to be Loved* ; *Awake, Awake, and I will not let thee go* are fine love lyrics. W. B. Yeats's *When You are Old* is a fine poem of love. His *Rose* poems also deal with love. Some of the poem treating the mythological subjects also deal with love both personal and mythological. *The Rose of the World, The Song of Wandering Aengus, The Love Pleads with His Friend for Old Friends, The Folly of Being Comforted*, etc., deal directly with love. And from love, Yeats can easily turn to women in general, *e. g.*, a poem like *On Woman* :

"May God be praised for woman
That gives up all her mind,
A man may find in no man
A friendship of her kind
That covers all he has brought
As with her flesh and borne,
Nor quarrels with a thought
Because it is not her own.
Though pedantry denies,
It's plain the Bible means
That Solomon grew wise
While talking with his queens
Yet never could, although
They say he counted grass,
Count all the praises due
When Sheba was his lass,

When she the iron wrought, or
When from the smithy fire
It shuddered in the water :
Harshness of their desire
That made them stretch and yawn,
Pleasure that comes with sleep,
Shudder that made them one."

8. Nature in Modern Poetry

Nature captivates the modern poet no less than the poet of the earlier ages. But the modern poet of Nature is not a mystic. He does not find any spiritual meaning in Nature. He is elated and exalted at the sight of nature's loveliness. He gives an exquisite picture of birds, clouds, landscapes, sea and countryside in his poetry. Masefield, Robert Bridges, Edmund Blunden are the great poets of Nature in modern poetry. W. B. Yeats also portrays Nature time and again. He cannot forget Sligo and the beautiful landscape of his mother's house in Ireland. Here are few passages which reflect Yeats's love of Nature :

"I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made :
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee.
And live alone in the bee-loud glade."

—*The Lake Isle of Innisfree.*

"The brawling of a sparrow in the caves,
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,
And all that famous harmony of leaves,
Had blotted out man's image and his cry."

—*The Sorrow of Love.*

"I went out to the hazel-wood,
Because a fire was in my head.
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread :
And when white moths were on the wing.
And moth-like stars flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout."

—*The Song of Wandering Aengus.*

"A woman's beauty is like a white
Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone
At daybreak after stormy night
Between two furrows upon the ploughed land ;
A sudden storm, and it was thrown
Between dark furrows upon the ploughed land,
How many centuries spent
The sedentary soul
Is toils of measurement
Beyond eagle or mole.

Beyond hearing or seeing,
Or Archimedes' guess,
To raise into being
That loveliness !"

—*A Woman's Beauty is Like a White Frail Bird.*

Most of the time Yeats makes nature a rich source of his imagery.

9. Complexity and Obscurity

Some modern poets are interested in delving deep into the recesses of the subconscious mind. Some others make their poems metaphysical, complex and obscure. Symbolism has become a common fashion either with the poets or with their critics. Rightly observes A. C. Ward, "We feel that much modern poetry is very difficult and that it does not always repay the labour involved in working it out. In the hundred years, complexity has been more and more heavily borne in all of us, and a false or affected simplicity is a detestable thing." But modern poetry is less verbose and less eloquent than that of the Victorian period. It is a reflection of modern life.

Q. 6. Give an estimate of W. B. Yeats as a lyric poet.

Or

Analyse some of the love-lyrics of Yeats and bring out his greatness as a love-poet.

Or

What are the distinguishing features of the lyrics of Yeats ? Illustrate your answer from the lyrics you have read.

Or

"Yeats is one of the greatest lyric poets of the 20th century England." Justify.

Or

"Yeats's lyric poetry shows a gradual evolution from simplicity to greater and greater complexity and intricacy. There is a corresponding gain in intensity." Elucidate.

Or

"Yeats's lyrics are characterized by simplicity of language, intricacy of design and pattern, depth of thought, and intensity of passion." Elucidate.

Ans. Yeats's genius was essentially lyrical. If he began his poetic career with dramatic poetry, it was because of his father's wish, who preferred dramatic poetry to the lyrical. He wrote lyrics of several kinds. These lyrics of Yeats can broadly be divided into four categories : (1) Lyrics of Escape, (2) Political Lyrics of Reminiscence, and (4) Love Lyrics. During the early part of his career, the poet for the most part writes escape-lyrics. His early lyrics like *The Song of* *the Happy Shepherd*, *The Stolen Child*, *The Man Who went to Fairyland*, *Down by the Sally Gardens*, etc., take us to a dream-world where the characters dance with fairies and enjoy the pleasures of fairyland. His early volumes of verses, *The Crossways* (1889), and *The Rose* (1893) include some of his finest and most widely anthologized lyrics. Most of these early lyrics are quaint and airy, simple, artful and eloquent to the heart. Yeats fully captures the native charm, the very spirit of folk-lore. The vague and blurred imagery, Pre-Raphaelite decoration, use of poetic words and soft haunting incantatory music, heighten the dreamy atmosphere and help to transport the readers to fairyland.

The poet continued to write such escape-lyrics even during his later phase of poetry. But these later escape-lyrics are different from their earlier counterparts in style and diction. Among the later lyrics of this kind, the *Byzantium* lyrics are the finest ones. The earlier lyrics are characterized by lightness and simplicity, the later lyrics by elaboration, complexity, richness and hardness of tone. Instead of the earlier sentimentality and wistful tone, we have now a sense of suffering and purification through facing the ordeal of life. In the earlier lyrics, he seeks an escape into an enchanted, utopian world, but in the later ones he wants to rise through self-knowledge and self-purification to a realm of 'unageing intellect'. The enchanted atmosphere, poetic vocabulary, vague imagery and haunting music are now replaced by prose-rhythms, hard words and glittering images.

Then we have political lyrics from Yeats. Out of politics, which generally is not a fit subject for poetry, Yeats produces intensely felt personal emotion and then pens it into an impersonal way. *Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation*, *September 1913*, *Easter 1916*, *Meditations in Times of Civil War* and *Sixteen Dead Men* are some of his finest lyrics inspired by the political scene in Ireland. Such lyrics display a maturity of Yeats's art. He is now able to reconcile the personal with the impersonal, and the peculiar with the universal. In them, he achieves a rare union of simplicity with intricacy of thought and intensity of emotion They also show Yeats's mythopoeic imagination at its best. For example, in *Easter 1916*, he writes :

"I have met them at close of day,
Coming with vivid faces.
From counter or desk among grey,
Eighteenth century-houses."

Thus, the poet is able to create a mythology from philosophers, statesmen, patriots, mystics, etc. The political lyrics are aflame with passion, and in this way a subject of little poetical interest is made moving and significant. They express the poet's disillusionment with the Irish people and his bitterness at their meanness and selfishness. Many of the martyrs of the Irish rebellion were his friends and so the poet felt their martyrdom deeply as a personal loss. All this gamut of personal emotions is poignantly expressed by these political lyrics. The poems are remarkable for their complexity and simplicity. They are bare and austere in expression but packed with thought and emotion.

Not only the Irish scene alone, but also the contemporary world situation inspired Yeats to write such fine lyrics as *The Second Coming*, and *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen.* His intense consciousness of impending horror, of some approaching doom, gives to these lyrics the immediacy and urgency of a prophecy. In *The Second Coming* specially the whole philosophy of history has been condensed into a little space so that the lyric is marked with a moment of insight, the poet's mystic vision, into a formidable future.

The third kind of lyrics includes the lyrics of reminiscence, such as, *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*, *The Municipal Gallery Revisited*, *Among School Children*, etc. 'In his poetry of Reminiscence —often constructed in longer irregular verse paragraphs, which he handles with great skill—he draws more and more on family memories and tradition ; we see Yeats once again trying to relate his past to his present, this time through a common tradition that links him with his ancestors. These lyrics are expressions of profound personal grief at the loss of friends and relatives who will never live again. They throb with human passion. "In such personal, particularized generosity of feeling no modern poet stands anywhere near Yeats."—(A. G. Stock).

His love-lyrics, however, exquisite in art are vague, fleeting. The poet is more in love with love itself than with any particular lady. His heroes wander in fairyland in the quest of imaginary ice-eyed queens, modelled after the wild, passionate heroines of Shelley. It was his meeting with Maud Gonne at the age of twenty-three, that transformed Yeats into a great love poet. He fell intensely in love with her, his devotion was passionate and lifelong, and henceforth, Maud Gonne is everywhere in his poetry. Yeats has succeeded in immortalizing the classical beauty and majestic form of his beloved. As A. G. Stock says, "If every painting of Maud Gonne vanished, something of her would remain creditable in Yeats's verses." He painted her as words can, dynamically, seeing her body as but an expression of the soul :

> "With Beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
> That is not natural in an age like this,
> Being high and solitary and most stern."

This is one example. At another place, he wrote of her in the following manner :

> "Tall and noble but with face and bosom
> Delicate in colour as apple blossom."

Maud Gonne is everywhere in verses of *The Rose* (1893), and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1819). Much of the love-poetry in these volumes is impersonal and symbolic. The poet does not express his love personally, but dramatically, through such symbols as Michael Robartes, Hanrahan, Aedh, etc., but we feel that the poignancy and ecstasy of these lyrics have personal significance. It is the poet who speaks through his characters, and Maud Gonne's face is everywhere. The lyrics are a glowing, passionate tribute of a lover to his mistress :

"But I, being poor, have only my dreams,
I have spread my dreams under your feet,
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams."

The ecstasy of personal love inspires the following :

"You need but lift a pearl-pale hand
And bind up your long hair and sigh
And all men's hearts must burn and beat."

Sometimes, the mood is one of restlessness resulting from the poet's awareness of the ugliness of reality intruding upon his image of his beloved. All things, 'uncomely and broken', "are wronging your image that blossoms arose in the deeps of my heart." Such love-lyrics must be ranked with the greatest love-poetry of the 20th century. Yeats brings his vision of her to everything he touches. He may write of Cathleen or of the stage and the players, but every woman tends to take the shape of Maud Gonne.

Maud Gonne transformed Yeats into one of the greatest love-poets of the modern age. Stauffer rightly suggests that with the possible exception of Donne, Yeats is the greatest love-poet in the English language, one in whose comparison all others look pale and bloodless.

Yeats's expression of love in his later poetry is straightforward and pointed. The love lyrics written after 1903, the year in which Maud Gonne married MacBride, have two chief features. First, they express the poet's bitter disillusionment, and secondly, they are characterized by a complexity of moods and tones. The poet is heart-broken and sometimes his frustration is expressed in an indignant outburst :

"Pardon that for a barren passions sake,
Although I have come close on forty-nine
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine."

Elsewhere, the expression is more self-controlled, and the very restraint increases the intensity of the lyric :

"Sweetheart, do not love long
I loved long and long,
And grew to be out of fashion
Like an old song."

Or, as in the following :

Never give all thy heart, love
Will barely seen worth thinking of
To passionate women, if it seem certain."

The mood is one of impatience and indignation in *Adam's Curse* written on the eve of Maud Gonne's marriage, and reflects the poet's consciousness of impending doom. At other times, unrequited love causes resignation and the poet asks, "Why should I blame her that she has filled my days with misery ?" The complexity of moods, and the shifts in tone which characterize Yeats's later love-lyrics are an indication of his mastery over his craft and of the depth and intensity of his feeling. The poet could not forget Maud Gonne up to the very end of his days, and her face keeps peeping out of his poetry in one guise or the other. Thus, even in as late a lyric as *Among School Children* she sets him dreaming of the past. While in *A Bronze Head* some mysterious, supernatural power is attributed to her, Helen and Deirdre are the ever-recurring symbols of her destructive beauty.

Maud Gonne has been loved as a woman of flesh and blood, but soul got the lion's share of love. Yeats was hypnotized by the personality of Maud Gonne. She is behind almost all the poems of W. B. Yeats. She has not only inspired his life, activities and poems she is in a way an eternal theme for the poems of the poet. In *The Wandering of Oisin* she is identified with Niamh and she is the projection of the Countess in *The Countess Cathleen.* In *A Prayer for My Daughter*, she is Helen, who chose MacBride as her husband and is one who is suffering from intellectual hatred. She is again the heroine of *A Bronze Head.* In *The Circus Animal's Desertion,* she is pity-crazed who gives her soul away, and 'the bread' whom 'the Fool and Blind Man stole'. Maud Gonne was to Yeats like Helen and Deirdre both natural and supernatural.

Yeats certainly enlarged the scope of the lyric by enclosing vast oceans in little pitchers. A short lyric like *No Second Troy,* through the use of Helen-Deirdre-Maud Gonne image fuses the past, the present and the future together. So is the case with *Leda and the Swan.* Yeats's lyrics create simultaneously an impression of compression and expansion. Secondly, Yeats released the English lyric from the tyranny and monotony of the iambic. He uses different metres and stanza-patterns, and displays a considerable skill in the use of long verse-line and the manipulation of pauses in such lines. Sometimes, he shows Donne-like ingenuity and skill and originality in the stanzaic structure of his lyrics. Thought and emotion determine the structure of the first stanza, and the subsequent stanzas are determined by the first.

Miss A. G. Stock has rightly pointed out the musical quality of Yeats's poetry. She says that the rhythms to which his mind moved were quiet and delicately precise. Some critics feel that Yeats had no ear for music. "This may be true," says Stock, "in the sense that he could not sing in tune nor catch the sound of his own voice speaking." But an ear for the cadence is different. And this he certainly had. His rhythms are formal, and mechanical. His lines are not cluttered with thick consonants where they should slide easily. He is solemn but never clumsy-footed, and can easily break into a dance, *e. g.*, *The Fiddler for Dooney*, *The Wind Among the Reeds*. "Yeats's rhythms are half-entranced like a man walking alone, lost in a strain of visionary thought, or incantatory, as if he thought of poetry as a priestly vocation." Many of his lyrics, therefore, have a lilt of a song. Many a time he is able to provide his lyrics the lightness of song as in the *Crazy Jane Poems* and *Words for Music Perhaps*.

Q. 7. Discuss Yeats's doctrine of the mask.

Ans. John Unterecker observes that the doctrine of mask helped Yeats write a poetry firmer, far more intense than his early verse. Seeking to be what he was not, Yeats disciplined himself and his art to form. Yeats wrote : "I take pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me, I have found something hard and cold, some articulation of the image, which is the opposite of all that I am in my daily life, all that my country is."

The gazebo of the world is false. Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show. Having put on our finery we take it off again. We strip the masks we have created for ourselves.

Yeats believed that we all wear false faces ; we wear masks ; we assume and try to show ourselves what we are not. We present our unreal and different persons to parents, teachers, lovers, tax-collectors, etc. We live in illusion. The real man remains always hidden.

But a poet imagines things that are not there. He also brings out false faces to set against the real ones and thus communicates reality to the world. The poet also wears the mask when he expresses personal feelings objectively. Yeats had a lot of personal utterances. He did not like to be called a sentimental. To save his art from becoming sentimental, he discovered the artificial technique of mask by which the personal feelings can be objectified. The mask gives to the 'personal utterance' the appearance of impersonal truth, and yet returns the emotive force of private felt beliefs. Yeats develops the theory that the poet in the act of creation is not seeking his self, but a mask is his anti-self, the antithesis of all that he is in life.

> "By the help of an image
> I call to my own opposite, summon all
> That I have handled least, least looked upon."

"Reality for Yeats is neither to be found in that buried self which directs and orders a man's life or in its mask, the anti-self, but in the product born of their struggle. Extroverts, Yeats felt, must flee their masks. Introverts, writers, musicians, all creative men must recognize their own proper masks, ideal opposites, and in trying to become those nearly impossible other selves create the dramatic tension from which art arises."—(Unterecker). The art arises out of the struggle between the two opposite forces of life—real and ideal. Graham Hough has also said in *The Last Romantics* that the mask is the creative principal and Yeats himself has said that out of the quarrel with the world we make poetry. "All creative activity depends on the energy to assume a mask to be deliberately reborn as something not oneself. Something of the thetrical element of affectation even is necessary to all active virtue. When the artist 'found hanging upon some oak of Dodoha an ancient mask painted and rebuilt to his liking and at last put it on, he found that another's breath came and went within his breath upon the carven lips and that his eyes were upon the instant fixed upon a visionary world."

The doctrine of the mask builds a private mythology for the poet. The individual tries to become that which is most unlike himself. The introvert artist puts on an extrovert mask. The subjective man assumes the mask of the man of action. Yeats's mask resembles Cuchulain's face, a hero striding out of the remote legendary Irish past a man of action, great fighter and great lover.

The poet's activity in assuming the mask, says Graham Hough, is parallel with that of the saint and the hero, though not identical with theirs. The saint seeks the anti-self of the whole world, renounces the world while it still has power to attract. The hero finds his mask in defeat, and loves the world until it breaks faith with him. The poet finds his mask in disappointment and loves the world until it breaks faith with him. The saint assumes his mask for ever and puts away the world and reduces his life to a round of customary duties. But the poet only assumes his mask while he is in the act of creation.

The poet had always been a fighter, he fought with himself. But out of this struggle he wrote fine poetry. In the words of Graham Hough, "The conflict between an acceptance of the natural world and the denial of it involved in an assumption of the mask is the theme of his greatest verse *The Tower*, and the two *Byzantium* poems."

Q. 8. Write a note on W. B. Yeats's treatment of Irish mythology and folklore in his poetry.

Ans. A review of Yeats's poetry reveals that he is a poet of 'Celtic Twilight' The underlying idea of his theory of the 'Celtic Twilight' is the realization—that poetry has lost its contact with religion; its images no longer express man's deepest thoughts about his own destiny. Industrial civilization has destroyed his relation with the natural world; and science and puritanism has initiated his relations with the Unseen. Therefore, W. B. Yeats found in escape from the modern impasse, a tap-root by which the arts could regain their sources of primitive energy. In his *The Celtic Twilight*, he wrote : "Folk-art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and the pretty, as certainly, as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted. Wherever it is spoken by the fireside, or sung by the roadside, or carved upon the lintel, appreciation of the arts that a single mind gives unity and design to, spreads quickly, when its hour is come".

Yeats was instinctively inclined towards Irish mythology and folklore. In his poem *A Coat*, he wrote :

I made my song a coat,
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
Dragons and gods and moons,
From heel to throat
And gave it to my song
And my song wore it.

Yeats believed that the modern literature lacked passion, whereas ancient Irish literature had a lot of it alongwith rich imagination and melancholy. Moreover, he also believed that if a literature was not imbued with passion and ancient beliefs, it would degenerate into a 'chronicle or circumstances or passionless fantasies'. The Irish literature "infused life into European literature. The framework of the *Divine Comedy* has been borrowed from the Celtic material. The Arthurian Legends, his Round Table and the Holy Grail and a variety of Gaelic legends transformed European literature and enthused it with a strength and spirit". That is why most important characters of the Irish literature—Cassandra, Helen, Deirdre, Lear, Trisham, Oisin, Cuchulain, etc. reappear and figure on the pages of Yeats.

There are several reasons behind Yeats's inclination towards Irish mythology and folklore. In childhood he had stayed for most of the time in a beautiful landscape of Ireland. His maternal grandparents and his mother had great interest in Irish folklore. His aunt used to narrate many a fairy tale. O'Leary's influence and Maud Gonne's inspiration, and his active involvement in Irish nationalism also strengthened his beliefs and convictions about the importance of the legendary past of his country. Not only by birth and breeding but also by temperament, Yeats's love for Irishry seems natural. Ireland is a country where the ghosts linger with a persistence race; there are many faces in the countryside where the dead emigrate, but the dead stay on Unlike people in Britain, the Irish with their faith in spirits, fairies and folklore are 'physically and mentally sound; it is the least collectivized, least industrialized country in western Europe, and unlike England it has not much of middle class'. As A. G. Stock observes, "Tradition in Ireland is that the gods were there before the Gods came, that they fought for their possession of the country and at last came to terms and withdrew into the hills, leaving the surface of the land to the invaders. And before the gods there were darker powers, some of whom still survive. However, that may be, the land is alive with spirits who are known and respected. Their deeds in different places are remembered; history trails away into myth and myth is projected forward in history. There are fairy hills, green-terraced mounds into which no farmer will drive a ploughshare. The fairies are seldom talked of, and most seldom by that name for fear of drawing their attention to the speaker." Born and brought up in such a land, Yeats very naturally made Irish mythology and folklore a source of inspiration and application.

Yeats himself believed in the existence of fairies, spirits and ghosts. He believed that Ballisodore was visited by the spirits and fairies and that whenever he went to their cottages, he was on the lookout for supernatural beings or happenings. It was on account of his such beliefs that he very much advocated for the element of imagination and the visionary in poetry. Very early in his career Yeats attempted to treat Irish legendary material on a large scale. The mythology which Yeats used extensively in his early poems was the great body of Gaelic heroic legend which had been represented to English readers of the late eighteenth century in the folk-prose 'epic' of Ossian by Macpherson. This mythology had never been wholly forgotten in Ireland and for the young Yeats it had the fascination that Greek mythology had for the men of the Renaissance. For him it was no mere antiquarianism, but something which he wholly absorbed and made part of his imaginative life as Milton absorbed the Hebrew sagas and Keats the Greek myths.

The Wanderings of Oisin is a long romantic narrative poem full of echoes of Morris, Shelley, Coleridge, Keats and Ferguson. Yet the mythology of Niamh and Angus, the Fenians and the Danaans is fresh and has "the beauty and wonder of altogether new things." In the first part, Oisin is playing about and going a-hunting. When Niamh, the daughter of a legendary king, entices him to accompany her to her place where only the youthful live. With this 'pearl-pale high-born' lady he lives for a hundred years in a land where broken faith has never been known before coming over to this land, his eyes grow dim with tears. This is a breach of country's laws and he has to leave it. In the second voyage during which he is accompanied by Niamh, Oisin thrust out from the Kingdom of Joy, is a pale copy of Hyperion. In the third voyage he comes upon an island (evidently Ireland) where he meets 'a monstrous slumbering folk'. Niamh and her husband halt near the king of these people, and ask him his story. Oisin after hearing the story decides to act on behalf of these people, but finds that he has become old and therefore useless.

The Land of Heart's Desire is a short play in which the conflict is placed in a peasant setting. The struggle for the soul of the girl Mary Bruin is a tragic theme because it is a struggle between two powers both of which are respected by the poet. In this play, Yeats uses folk-material. The rural world of Irish peasantry is made to fuse with the popular belief in spiritual presences. In *Countess Cathleen* he reveals the supernaturalism prevailing among the Irish folk where the Countess has to sell her soul to receive back the cheap souls of a number of people of her family. *Cuchulain's Flight with the Sea* is an important handling of legendary material. When Cuchulain was returning from some battle after victory, his wife Emer was told that with him was coming a beautiful beloved of him.

Out of jealousy, she asked her son to go and fight with the King, his father. Battle followed without the father knowing the reality. He knew too late that he had put his son to death. He was too sad and could not be consoled. So Conchubar, "the subtlest of all men" asked his Druids to put delusions in the King's mind, so that he may fight the horses of the Sea, instead of slaying his own men in fury. The Druids did their job. In the *Island of Statues*, a shepherd and shepherdess overcome an enchantress on an island and find the flower which will restore to life those whom she has turned into statues. *The Stolen Child* portrays the dream of fairyland. There are a number of other poems which treat mythology and folklore.

Q. 9. What is symbolism ? Give an estimate of W. B. Yeats as a symbolist.

Or

"Yeats was a symbolism from the beginning to the end, and his symbolism increased in complexity with the maturing of his powers." Elucidate.

Or

"The poetic effect of the symbols of Yeats's maturity is one of vastness and continuous expansiveness." Discuss with illustrations.

Or

Comment on W. B. Yeats's use of symbols in his poetry.

Ans. Generally 'Symbolism' may be defined as "the representation of a reality on one level of reference by a corresponding reality on another". According to Kenneth Berke, "A symbol is the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience". In literature the symbolic use of a word is distinguished from the emotive use of a word and is tantamount to intending the dictionary definition of the word. According to Edmund Wilson, symbolism is an attempt by carefully studied means—a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors—to communicate unequal personal feelings. Because of this complexity and depth and power of the symbol, C. M. Bowra regards symbolic poetry as a kind of mystic poetry, a poetry in which the poet tries to convey his sense of the mystery of life.

Symbolism is necessary for a poet who wants to say more than what meets the ear, wants to suggest something beyond the expressed meaning. A symbol may better express the sense of mystery and expansiveness, the feelings of richness and complexity than other means. Hence symbols make the language rich and expressive. The symbol may serve (a) to interpret a theme, (b) to make it acceptable, (c) as an escape, (d) to awaken dormant or suppressed experience, and (e) as adornment or exhibition.

The seeds of symbolism may be traced in the allegories of Longland, Spenser and Bunyan, the poetry of the Metaphysicals, William Blake and to some extent in the poetry of the Romantic poets. But as a conscious movement, Symbolism was born in France as a reaction against naturalism and precision, and exactitude of the naturalist school represented by Zola. The French Symbolists led by Mallarme and Verlaine, condemned mere 'exteriority' and laid great emphasis on the treatment of sensations or the representation of the vague, fleeting impressions that constantly pass before the mind's eye. It meant a virtual withdrawal from life, a concentration on inner experience and its expression through the use of symbols. The Symbolists attempted to exclude from art those elements which in life had receded into the realm of the general, the commonplace. Thus, the symbolists tended to repudiate outer actuality, which they identified with bourgeois civilization, and, returning into themselves, to concentrate upon their own experience, which became more and more private and personal. The representative symbolists—Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarme—in their search for ideal beauty weakened their grip on actual life, and this made it easier for successors to run away from actuality altogether experience.

That W. B. Yeats was a symbolist is not disputed. Arthur Symons called him "the chief representative of that movement in our country". To W. Y. Tyndall, Yeats was a symbolist and that he was a symbolist from the beginning of his career to the end. Tyndall is of the opinion that Yeats was an heir to the French through Symons, i.e., Yeats absorbed certain of the doctrines of French Symbolism as preached by Mallarme through the medium of Arthur Symons. Yeats himself did not know French, therefore, whatever knowledge of the French symbolistic technique he had was derived at secondary sources through Arthur Symon's translation of the works of Mallarme, Villiers and other French symbolists. But Tyndall is also of the opinion that the sources and influences on Yeats are not those of the French origin, and Yeats was a symbolist even before the French symbolists. He loved Blake and praised Shelley. His association with Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophy, his membership of the Golden Dawn, his interest in Kabbalah—all contributed to his love of symbols. Yeats's absorption in the world of unseen realities and his eulogy of visions deepened his faith in spiritual truths which could be grasped with the help of symbols. It has been argued that Yeats used symbolism to hide the world rather than to reveal another one. Yeats's love for symbolism was also necessitated by his predicament. He loved and worshipped Maud Gonne who became a symbol of beauty for him. But the anguish and frustration he had to face needed some cover ; hence, he used symbols to conceal his anguish.

The symbols that are frequently used by Yeats are the following :

The Rose

The rose is the most complex of all the symbols of Yeats. He used it as an emblem of beauty, as representation of 'transcendental love or mystic rapture, of the inner reality, of divinity'. Yeats uses

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the symbol of rose in different contexts. In the *Secret Rose*, the rose is intended to be a symbol of Esotericism :

> Far-off, most secret and inviolate Rose,
> Enfold me in my hour of hours ; where those
> Who sought thee in the holy Sepulchre,
> Or in the wine-vat, dwell beyond the stir,
> And tumult of defeated dreams ; and deep,
> Among pale eyelids, heavy with the sleep
> Men have named beauty. Thy great leaves enfold
> The ancient beards, the helm of ruby and gold
> Of the crowned Magi...........

In *The Rose of Peace*, love means earthly love as it does in a popular song ; but the rose in *The Rose of the World* has a complicated meaning. On the one hand it symbolizes transient earthly love and beauty, on the other, eternal love and beauty. The rose in *The Rose of Battle* is more occult, symbolizing God's side in the battle of spirit against matter. Here the rose is a refuge from earthly love. Wearing the militant rose of ruby and intellectual flame as the symbol of his life and hope, the Rosicrucian knight of the story *Out of the Rose* wages God's wars against outer order and fixity. The rose in *To the Rose upon the Road of Time*, is the rose, but it is also the power of the creative imagination and occult philosophy too, which, Yeats fears, may remove him so completely from the present world that he will cease to be a poet.

The Wind among the Reeds

In the poems comprised in this volume, Yeats's symbolism becomes personal, more suggestive and more complex. He now clothes his personal feelings and emotions in an elaborate garb of mythological symbolism. In his own words, personal emotion is woven into a general pattern of myth and symbol in this volume. Aedh, Hanrahan, Robartes, etc. are used as symbols to express the poet's own love, pain, suffering and ecstasy. The poems deal with an absolute beauty seen by the poet in an impersonal vision, but invested with a profound personal significance. And his vision of impersonal beauty always takes the form of Maud Gonne. The Sidhe, the Fairies, Aengus, the Celtic gods, the shadowy horses, all have traditional mythological significance.

The Wind among the Reeds gives "dumb things voices and bodiless things bodies". Reviewing this volume, Arthur Symons hailed it as a triumph of symbolist indirection. Through the swooning, luscious diction, the musical, individual rhythms, the harmonies and overtones, and the interaction of many traditional but mysterious images each poem becomes the symbol of an unstatement more lavishly than the French were accustomed to do. The book is closer in feeling and method to the works of the French symbolists than any other which appeared in England in the nineties.

A Vision

A Vision has explicated Yeats's philosophy through his elaborate machinery of symbols. The human personality corresponds with twenty-eight phases of the moon represented through a great wheel with twenty-eight spokes. The soul passes through all the twenty-eight stages. Yeats's famous symbol is the symbol of interpenetrating gyres or whirling cones. The intermingling cones represent cyclic movement of history. They also symbolize subjectivity and objectivity of the soul.

In *A Vision*, the Earth, the Water, the Air and the Fire are symbolic of the four ages of individual man as well as the four ages of civilization :

> He with Body wages a fight
> Body won and walks upright.
> Then he struggled with the Heart ;
> Innocence and peace depart.
> Then he struggled with the mind,
> His proud Heart he left behind.
> Now his wars with God begin ;
> At strokes of midnight God shall win.

The Later Poems

In his later poems like *The Tower* and *Winding Stair*, the tower and stair are both traditional and personal symbols. The tower symbolizes ascendancy, i.e., soul's attempt to rise higher and higher and the winding stair stands for the difficulties that come......the way of such ascendancy. At other times, the tower becomes the symbol of tradition, of national heritage, and at still other times a symbol of violence and of bloodthirstiness. In *A Prayer for My Daughter*, the tower suggests his vision of the dark future of humanity. Likewise, the Byzantium poems are also symbolic. There is a creation of the spiritual world. In the union between Leda and the Swan, the juxtaposition of spirit and matter are symbolized together. It also refers to the meeting of the god and the man and the Dove and the Virgin.

Thus, it is seen that Yeats uses general as well as personal symbols. He distinguishes between two kinds of symbols, those that evoke emotions alone, and those that evoke ideas alone, or ideas mingled with emotions. His preference, however, is for the second type of symbols. Among the intellectual symbols there are two categories—cooperative and emphatic. While any symbols could serve either function, the four elements of earth, air, fire and water frequently are good examples of cooperative symbols. Yeats intended to keep the symbols as manifold as possible in their suggestibillty. He tried to bring together in one symbol truth and beauty, spirit and intellect, passion and thought. His symbolism increased in complexity with the maturing of his powers.

Q. 10. "Bitterness and disillusionment are the keynotes of Yeats's poetry of the middle period." How do you account for this note of bitterness ?

Or

Show that realism—an awareness of the fact of life—is the distinctive note of the middle poetry of W. B. Yeats.

Ans. The early poetry of W. B. Yeats is the poetry of escape which transports the reader as well as the poet to a dream-world of phantasy, dealing with Irish countryside, folklore, peasant beliefs and traditions. The poet escapes from the world of solid and substantial reality into an insubstantial fairy-world of Irish mythology. In this period Yeats is under the influence of *Arcadia*, Spenser and Shelley. He is seen escaping to an imaginary island, say of Innisfree, to a perfect world where he may get some rest and relief, he seems tired of this world of fever and fret, of cruelty and injustice. The undercurrent of disillusionment is seen in the poetry of this early period. Yeats is disillusioned with life ; he is dissatisfied with it ; he is in a dilemma to reject or not to reject this world. But he tries to find a refuge in the enchanting world of Irish mythology and folklore.

The poetry of the middle period, i.e., the period between 1900 and 1915, there is a marked transition in Yeats as a poet. In fact *The Wind among the Reeds* is a turning point. Now the poet was beginning to come out of his ivory tower. He had begun to feel the discontent with life. This discontent was caused by three major factors : (a) the monkish hatred for science and increasing ugliness and barrenness of an industrial civilization, (b) his consciousness of the conflict and tensions of human life, and (c) his awareness of the transitoriness of youth and beauty. In the *Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart*, he declared :

All things uncomely and broken,
    All things worn out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway,
    The creak of a lumbering cart,
Are wronging your image
    That blossoms a rose in the deep of my heart.

This sort of disillusionment got aggravated by various other factors in the middle period of his poetic career. His frustration in love—Maud Gonne married Major Macbride in 1903—fundamentally reshaped his attitude towards poetry. To the cultivated, poetic and idealistic Yeats, the behaviour of Maud Gonne came as a severe shock. So bitterness of frustrated love, his dissatisfaction with the Irish people who had kissed Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, the disillusionment caused by the pettiness and meanness of real life which he experienced during his involvement in public controversies, like the Lane controversy, his connection with the Abbey Theatre, the selfishness and hypocrisy of Irish politicians, his contact with Synge who advised him, "before verse can be human-again, it must learn to be brutal", study of Blake, and contact with Arthur Symons and Ezra Pound, his entanglement with Theosophy and other short-cuts to the secrets of the soul, all helped Yeats to come down to earth. Hence the poetry of this period shows a keen sense of life and reality, and is again full of disillusionment, impatience and indignation.

As Graham Hough has also explained, Yeats was soon frustrated with the Aestheticism of the Pre-Raphaelites as well as the religious themes. Pre-Raphaelitism for him was mainly a movement of ideas. Yeats could not remain satisfied with it. Ireland with its relative simplicity of life and its stock of legends still active in the minds of the peasants could provide a better soil for the poet's passions to find maturity. By this time Yeats had come to the conclusion that poetry should not escape from the real life, there should not be a rejection of real life, but an acceptance of it. So his themes became realistic, imagination was rescued from abstractions, he realizes that there was more enterprise in 'walking naked'. In *The Coming of Wisdom with Time,* he asserts :

> Through all the days of my youth,
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun,
> Now I may wither into the truth.

At this stage of his poetic development, Yeats is more and more involved in 'the externality', in the confusion of the contemporary Irish scene, and feels an urge to express his own reaction to it. Now his themes become more and more realistic. In the opening of *The Seven Woods,* he writes :

> I have forgot awhile
> Tara uprooted, and new commonness,
> Upon the throne and crying about the streets
> And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,
> Because it is alone of all things happy.

About these lines A. G. Stock observes : "Yeats in retreat from them, is walking in the woods of Coole Park, Lady Augusta Gregory's country-house. It is as if the dreamer of *The Wind among the Reeds* has opened his eyes for a moment on the contemporary world rollicking around him and turned away from it in distaste. A reader of the early Yeats might be less surprised that he had forgotten the paper flowers on the lamp-posts than that he had deigned to remember them at all. The descent into an actual time and place is a new departure in his poetry; and in this thin book of fourteen poems there is a good deal that is new."

The tone of this new poetry of Yeats is certainly that of bitterness and frustration which is caused by failure and frustration in love and his criticism as a poet and a participant in Irish National Movement. In the words of David Daiches, "He was also irritated by the pettiness and meanness of the ordinary citizen with whom his work in Ireland brought him into constant contact. Now there is a bitterness in his poetry that is far removed from the plaintive melancholy of his earlier work." In *The Adam's Curse*, we are told, that the common people are a 'noisy set' who cannot appreciate the pains and labour involved in artistic creation. Yeats's indignation is expressed in the following lines :

> My curse on plays,
> That have to be set up in fifty ways,
> On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
> Theatre, business, management of men.

His love poetry of this period is also marked with this very sentiment of bitterness and disillusionment. The tone is more realistic and mood more complex, and the poet comes out of his isolated retreat into the world of concrete reality and adorns his verse with events and facts of the day-to-day life. Now the soap-bubble colours vanish, the fairy-land music fades away, we behold only earthy and clear, and bare outlines of cold Clare rock and Galway rock and horn. The poet begins to learn a new vocabulary, and new technique. Instead of florid and musical words, now he uses prosaic words of everyday speech and concentrates on the gross essence of thought.

Thus, the poetry of the middle period of Yeats's poetic development is more realistic than his earlier poetry. By now he had achieved a new power of including in poetic experience material from daily life which had hitherto been avoided. But the note of dejection and disillusionment is there in the poetry of this period.

Q. 11. Discuss obscurity in Yeats's poetry, and also trace out its causes.

Ans. Various factors may cause obscurity in a poet's work. Browning is obscure because of his philosophy ; Yeats is also obscure because of the obscurity and complexity of his thought and his learned classicism which is quite different from that of the classicist and the neo-classicists. So generally, obscurity is caused either by the complexities and brevities of style or by profundity of thought or psycho-analysis. In modern age, some poets have made their poetry by using difficult symbols in an untraditional way.

Yeats is definitely obscure for two reasons—first, he uses a great deal of symbolism which is obscure ; secondly, his poetry is a craving for a search of system about which Yeats himself was not in his mind for long. But in his case, obscurity does not arise because of carelessness in style. He is a conscious artist who writes his verses after a great deal of care and revision.

Yeats made ample use of Irish mythology, legends and historical and geographical landmarks of Irish countryside. Modern readers are not much familiar with the Irish and Gaelic myths. The Druids, the Sidhes, and the Danaan children from mythology, personages like Cuchulain, Oisin, Deirdre, Usna's children, from Irish legends, geographical features like Knocknarea, Drumahair, etc., figures from Irish folk-lore ; King Goll, Moll, Magic, which appear and re-appear in Yeats's poetry at every turn of the road, confuse and bewilder the readers. But for this deficiency or obscurity it is the reader and not the poet who is to be blamed. The reader must come to his poetry with some knowledge of these Irish features.

Secondly, as Prof. A. G. Stock remarks, "Yeats's style is stripped, and utterly dependent on the intense life of his mind. When he is difficult, it is because of the thought, for his thought is not confused, but too well-knit and too remote from most people's preconceptions to be followed easily."

Thirdly, Yeats's poetry being a battle-ground for the clash of opposites confuses the reader by its paradox. Many a time images from various sources are yoked together ; sometimes there is a far-fetchedness in them. His mind moves with great swiftness from one dissimilar concept to another, and the past and present, the near and the distant, the spiritual and the physical, the temporal and the eternal, the body and the soul, the sensuous and the intellectual are all juxtaposed. The average reader lacks this mental agility and fails to keep pace with the poet, and so understands this only after repeated and laborious readings.

Yeats was a symbolist from the beginning to the end. In his early poetry, his symbolism is elementary and traditional and presents no difficulties for his readers, but in his later poetry his symbolism is personal and highly complex. The swan, the tower, the winding stair, etc., are all personal symbols. His symbols are rich in emotive and evocative values. His images often have a processional quality. They give rise to a host of other images. Thus, two or three or more than three images are sometimes woven in one image. For example, in *No Second Troy*, he weaves Helen-Deirdre-Maud image on the one hand, and fuses past, present and future together on the other hand. Obviously, therefore, such a complex system of symbolism and imagery would strain any reader's mind.

Quite early in his life Yeats has lost faith in traditional concepts and beliefs, and he searched for a system or pattern which may give coherence and unity to his thoughts. This effort of hammering into unity also a factor which makes his poetry obscure or difficult. This search led him to the study of magic, theology, astrology, the philosophy of Plato, Plotinus, etc., and the other occultists and Orientalists. At last, he developed a system of his own, and this system being an amalgamation of various currents and cross-currents, various climates and religions, various schools of philosophy and supernaturalism makes his poetry pungently obscure.

Often a sentence of Yeats is a spoken thought, developing as it moves. It differs from the conversational language only by the absence of every unnecessary word, detail or superfluity. A speaker can lengthen his pauses, intensify his stresses, and convey much more through gestures than can be expressed by mere words. A speaker can often omit verbal links, or leave out pronouns. But in writing, the speech is translated from the eye to the ear, and sentences flow differently, and words must follow a different order and syntax. A writer, who tries to imitate speech-syntax in his writing, runs the risk of being considered obscure and unintelligible as he does not enjoy the advantage of the free manipulation of pause, stress and gesture of spoken language. Sometimes his obscurities arise from this : "a meaning ambiguous on paper can be cleared up, when the movement of thought is understood as a whole, by an infliction of the voice." —(Stock).

To sum up, Yeats is difficult for most readers, partly because of his condensed language—usually simple in vocabulary but packed with meaning—partly because of his abrupt transitions as in excited talk with friends, but chiefly because of the sheer concentration into his phrases of years of passionate and lonely thought, thought often most unusual, strange, and novel. However, all his poems become clearer as one looks closer and closer at them, and each subsequent poem throws light on the previous ones. Yeats may be obscure at places but his is that type of obscurity, "which enriches a poem rather than impoverishes it by giving suggestions of depth that cannot be produced in any other way."—(David Daiches).

Q. 12. Discuss W. B. Yeats as a Thinker.

Or

Write a note on Yeats's Thought and Philosophy.

Ans. Yeats's philosophy is difficult to analyse in an instance. It had no set directions in the beginning, and was to determine and shape its system. As David Daiches puts it, "The problem of Yeats was not that of finding what he ought to say...His problem was that of giving order and proportion to a set of beliefs ; he sought a mode of expression rather than a set of dogmas to express. It was this search for a pattern that led him to the study of magic, occultism, Indian Theology, etc., till he was able to formulate a system of his own. This system or philosophy he has enunciated in considerable detail in his prose work, *The Vision*, 1925, and later revised and enlarged in *The Vision*, 1937.

Yeats's system of philosophy is a curious mixture of philosophy, mythology, magic, occultism and symbolism. As this system is relevant to an understanding of his poetry, we shall briefly consider here some of its basic features. First is his doctrine of the mask, that is, the doctrine of self and anti-self. Within each individual there is a clash of personalities, each is torn by a number of opposite pulls within him. It is for this reason that the man desires his opposite and is irresistibly drawn towards it. Obviously, Yeats was to formulate such a theory by the manifold frustrations and failures, both in his public and private life. He writes, "If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others." Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code is, therefore, theatrical, consciously dramatic, "the wearing of a mask". This wearing of a mask, "this second self," is important. While torn with conflict within, despite frustrations and disappintments, one must still wear a smiling face and do his duty. In Yeats's poetry two types of man constantly appear and reappear. One is a lonely visionary, and the other is "a half-devilish, half-ascetic figure" delighting in the senses, and together they represent the two antithetical aspects of the poet's personality. The antithesis between the real and the ideal, the body and the soul, the self and the anti-self, the recluse and the man of action, runs through all but the earliest poetry of Yeats. The poetry of the last phase shows that the antithesis has not been resolved, but there is ever an attempt at the reconciliation of opposites with a cold, stoic detachment.

Two other important features of Yeats's system are : his conception of history as a cyclic process, and his division of human personality into twenty-six types governed by the twentyeight phases of the moon. History he conceived of as a cyclic process, revolving like a gyre or a wheel. Each age, each civilization, has a period of growth and maturity, each reaches a zenith, and then disintegrates giving place to a new age and a new culture. This law of historical development is also applicable to the individual. A man has to pass through a number of phases corresponding to the phases of the Moon and then ultimately he decays and declines Yeats believed that the present historical cycle has reached the stage of disintegration, and the future of humanity lies with the revival of such ancient modes as the Celtic or Irish way of life.

In fact, he went on hammering his various thoughts into unity. His main interests were literature, a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality, and his constant effort was to fuse all these together. He welded nationalism and poetry together. But it was too difficult to fuse these two with his form of philosophy which was concerned with occult and the supernatural. It was this search for unity that led him towards Hindu philosophy. He was initiated into Hindu Vedantic Philosophy by a young Brahmin Mohini Chatterji whom he and Russell had invited to teach them the Vedantic Philosophy of the East.

W. B. Yeats is immensely influenced by Plato, Plotinus, Gautam Buddha and the Hindu philosophy. But though he is influenced, he is not dominated by any philosophy. If he has found and liked certain attitudes and views in different religions and systems of philosophy it is because he himself believed in them and they serve only as the confirmation of his own views. Though he was influenced by Plato, yet he writes, "Those Platonists are a curse......God's fire upon the wane" and "I cry in Plato's teeth." He also condemns Plotinus where he says 'I mock Plotinus's thought'. At moments he agrees with Plato as in the heroic defence of a woman's priming, "Before the World was Made." Plato's philosophy is used only to the extent that it can be made Yeatsian, 'the extent to which the bodiless can be bodied.' And so is the case with Hinduism and Buddhism. He believed in reincarnation like the Hindus and Gautam Buddha. But he was too much in love with flesh and blood, with the world and Maud Gonne in it, to reach near Buddhistic doctrine of killing the desires. And unlike Hindus, he did not like the state of *Nirvana*. His cycle always repeats. Graham Hough has nicely put the difference between Yeatsian philosophy and the Hindu-Buddhistic doctrines, and has stated that Yeats was nearer Blake than the Hindus or the Buddhists. He writes : "The belief in reincarnation has attracted two types of mind—one pessimist and quietist like Gautama ; the other energetically in love with the whole of man's psycho-physical experience, like Blake. The one sees in human life......everywhere sorrow, everywhere impermanence, everywhere unreality, and it sees the wheel of becoming as a weary round from which it is the aim of the human soul to escape. The other, though it may sometimes pay temporary tribute to this oriental attitude, is so deeply attached to the phenomenal world that it cannot bear to think of it except as externally recurrent ; if it believes in spirits, it gives them aerial bodies ; if it has remote and formal hope of being saved from the cycle of rebirth, it wants to postpone its salvation as long as possible. It is to this type that Yeats belongs. The irrevocable choice, the final judgment of Christian eschatology would have been infinitely repugnant to him, if he had ever seriously entertained it, which in fact he does not seem to have done. The belief in progress is equally repugnant, for it implies that the future will be different from the past, and Yeats is in love with experience with the world as it has been. So he pictures man moving after phases of various complexity, to his starting-point, the unself-conscious life of nature. History moves in a similar round, and when one cycle is completed it starts on the round again. The same rhythm is preserved though the second cycle does not merely repeat the first, and its exact nature is always incalculable. Thus, there is always the possibility of new experience, though it cannot differ fundamentally from the old."—(Graham Hough).

Yeats is neither a Hindu, nor a Buddhist nor a Christian. He is not a follower of Christ for it is not in Christian teaching that he sought the all-inclusive liberating truth. He sought the truth within rather than beyond the subjective self. He finds truth in life giving sap drawn up through the roots rather than rain falling from heaven on the leaves. Yeats's writing does not echo that emphasis on shared suffering and shared salvation which is what makes out Christianity. Yeats, however, is nearer Blake only when he is compared with Hindu, Buddhist and Christian religions. Yet he is different from Blake in many ways. Whereas Blake condemns the world of five senses, Yeats gives it substantial acceptance.

Yeats accepted neither science nor Christianity, but he did accept an older world of occultism and magic. In his opinion, what is called magic is in reality the evocation of spirit, that is, the power to create visions of truth in the depth of the mind when the eyes are closed. According to Yeats, there are three doctrines which are the basis of magical practices. These doctrines are :

1. That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another and create a single mind, a single energy.

2 That the borders of our memory are also ever shifting, and our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature itself.

3. That this great mind and this great memory can be evoked by symbols.

In conclusion, we can say that Yeats's system of philosophy or thought is a synthesis of poetry, philosophy, occultism and magic, and nationalism. In his search for occult wisdom, he attended spiritualists' meetings, studied Rosicrucianism, and joined secret societies for the study and practice of magic. Mohini Chatterji taught him a negation of life, that all desire is evil, but there is no trace in Yeats of such a complete rejection of life. Nevertheless, "Oriental philosophy liberated him from what was uncongenital in his age, but he took from it what suited his inherent genius." Broadly speaking, his Pseudo-scientific-magical system may be traced back in its essentials to Plato and Plotinus, the occultists and the mystics, Hindu Vedantism and Gautama Buddha and Christianity. But such influences should not be over-emphasized. Yeats is only himself. He is a lonely figure. This aloofness pervades the whole of his thought. "He demonstrates that a man can walk alone. In our age of collective security this is a portent, all the more significant because so few desire to see it."—(A. G. Stock). Yeats has his own beliefs. And the important thing about his poems is that they do not seem to have been written merely to express them. Yeats is not doctrinal : He 'relies on the complexity of poetic structure to prevent his verse from becoming doctrinal'.

Yeats is not of the earth like Keats, nor of heaven like Shelley, nor again of hell like Byron. His true country, says Arnold Ussher, is Purgatory—a world of phantoms in whom the heart nevertheless beats—a world of piercing light, 'gyring' birds and naked trees, a Russian-ballet universe of frozen energy and 'agonies of flame that cannot singe a sleeve', a world which yet is a true reflex of the emptiness and the peculiarly electric air of Ireland. In his world, there is not the immortality of the Become. Life to him is a continual Becoming.

Q. 13. Discuss the metaphysical content of Yeats's poetry.

Ans. One of the most important movements in the history of the 20th century English poetry is the revival of interest in the metaphysical poetry of the 17th century. The interest was stimulated and accentuated by the appearance of Grierson's admirable edition of

Donne's poems in 1912. As mentioned by David Daiches, the metaphysical poets were now esteemed once again for their toughness and complexity, their fusion of thought and passion. Their poetic and stylistic techniques—the use of pun and paradox, irony, wit and humour, their vein of realism and cynicism, their use of harsh colloquial diction and rhythms, their concern with ambivalence of experience—were revived and imitated by the moderns. Yeats too could not remain unaffected by the metaphysical school of poetry, for he himself writes, in one of his poems, in the following manner :

> "And I may dine at journey's end
> With Landor and with Donne."

Before we proceed further into our enquiry, it is worthwhile to know clearly well what we mean by metaphysical content or metaphysical poetry. The term 'metaphysics' was first used by Dryden for Donne's lyrics. Later on, Dr. Johnson dwelt upon it elaborately and said that the metaphysical poets were men of learning and made a pedantic display of their strange knowledge. They affected a peculiar wit which may be described as a kind of 'discordia concors', a combination of dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblance in things apparently unlike. Their fondness for analysis, which broke an image into bits, led them to the dissection of emotion rather than a direct and impassioned expression of it. Harshness and irregularity of their verse which is poetry only to the eye, not to the ear. But Dr. Johnson's approach was to find out values and virtues which were negative. Prof. Douglas Bush has thrown light upon the capacity of the metaphysical poets to live simultaneously on different planes of thought and existence, modern, physical and spiritual, emotional and intellectual. This aspect has also been underlined by T. S. Eliot who has been a distinguished advocate of Donne in the present century. He observes : "I take as metaphysical poetry that in which what is ordinarily apprehensible by thought is brought within the grasp of feeling or that in which what is ordinarily only felt is transformed into thought without ceasing to be feeling." It is in tune with Prof. Bush and Mr. T. S. Eliot that Yeats can be estimated as a metaphysical poet, for his poetry lives upon several planes simultaneously. Like the poems of the metaphysical poets, the poetry of Yeats is to a great extent lyrical ; in subject it is chiefly religious or amatory ; there is much metrical facility, even in complicated lyrical stanzas ; the poetic style is sometimes almost startling in its sudden beauty of phrase and melody of diction, but there are unexpected turns of language and figures of speech.

So there are many features of the metaphysical school which are harmonized well with Yeats's natural bent. The metaphysical poets delighted in bringing together the opposites of life. Their minds moved with great agility from one dissimilar concept to another and in this way the antimonies of life were juxtaposed. Yeats too brought together in the poetry the opposites of life, *e.g.*, the human and the non-human, age and youth, physical decay and intellectual maturity, the temporal and the eternal, the spiritual and the sensuous, the past and the present, etc.

Like the poetry of the metaphysical poets, there is also in the poetry of Yeats an intellectual tone, a cold, detached, intellectual analysis of emotion. This element predominates in the later poetry of Yeats. In the poem entitled *The Phases of the Moon*, a passage like the following shows an intellectual play deriving from a handling on several different levels of thought-pattern based on an esoteric myth :

> "Were not our beds far off, I would ring the bell,
> Stand under the rough roof-timbers of the hall
> Beside the castle door, where all is
> Dark austerity......"

Another feature of the metaphysical poetry is the unification of sensibility. As an illustration, high passion is combined with a cold, hard, intellectual exposition and in this way are united past and present in *No Second Troy*, *The Cold Heaven* and *The Magi*. The two Byzantium poems are further loaded with metaphysical thought content. The metaphysical thought-content accounts for much of the power and complexity as well as obscurity of Yeats's later poetry. In the *Supernatural Songs*, Yeats presents his metaphysics through the person of the aged Ribh. The thought is also startling and new, and beyond the comprehension of the average reader.

Yeats also uses the metaphysical stylistic devices in his poems. He applies to his poetry not only epigrammatic terseness, force and intensity of metaphysical poetry. His use of speech rhythms and colloquial diction, his choice of harsh, choppy words to convey his sense of the harshness of reality, often the bitterly cynical and ironical tone of his poetry, all show his close affinities with Donne and his school. Like them he loves hyperboles, and often expresses himself in a forthright, hyperbolic manner. Even an early poem like *Adam's Curse* makes use of such stylistic devices. In *The Fascination of What is Difficult* we have :

> "My curse on plays
> That have to be set up in fifty ways,
> On the day's war with every knave and dolt
> Theatre business, management of men......"

The following lines have a coarse brutality, almost Donne-like :

> "A woman can be proud and stiff
> When on love intent ;
> But Love has pitched his mansion in
> The place of excrement ;
> For nothing can be sole or whole
> That has not been rent.

Like Donne, Yeats also experimented with a number of metrical forms with great success. He showed great mastery in the handling of the octosyllabic line and showed its conversational possibilities, freed the English lyric from the tyranny of the iambic, and used the long line with consummate skill. Indeed, the various stanza-forms handed down to us from Chaucer through Spenser have been used by Yeats with perfect mastery. As David Daiches says, "Like the poetry of Donne, the poetry of Yeats also displays an increase of freedom in the handling of rhythms combined with a growing originality and variety in stanza-forms."

Q. 14. Write a note on Yeats's diction and versification.

Or

Discuss the art and technique of William Butler Yeats.

Or

Write an essay on Yeats's craftsmanship.

Ans. As Norman Jeffares has analysed, Yeats had two main methods of poetic creation : one spontaneous and the other a laborious process involving much alteration and substitution In the early phases of his poetic career, he relied entirely on the magic of inspiration and gave himself up to "the chief temptation of the artist, creation without toil." As he matured and grew, he mixed inspiration with perspiration, and he adopted a method which requires constant labour, constant modifications and excisions. He was a conscious artist who polished and repolished his verse and tried to say, what he had to say, in apter phrase. His observations in *Adam's Curse* throw significant light on his artistic methods :

> "I said, 'A line will take us hours may be,
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought
> Our stitching and unstitching has been naught'."

Another remarkable feature about Yeats's diction is : Yeats's poetry, like Milton's, passes from decorative beauty through eloquence and magniloquence to a condition beyond eloquence—not to Milton's austere witnessing, but almost to song. spare and high and free. Thereafter, in the final phase, it maintains an equilibrium, magniloquent at times, at times stripped and singeing "—(Peter Ure)

Poetry, in the beginning, too, did not come very easily to Yeats. In a letter to Robert Bridges, Yeats writes, "When I wrote verse, five or six lines in two or three hours were a day's work." Thus, he composed slowly and painstakingly, showing his sincerity as an artist. Many of his poems were first planned in prose drafts which were then cast in poetic form. The first poetic draft itself underwent successive rewritings and revisions till all that was faulty in metre and rhyme was eschewed and formal perfection achieved. Often he would chant a poem aloud to find the right word which would convey his meaning as well as fit into the sound effect which he desired to create. His poems have intensity and complexity of a careful artist, but this is true only of his mystic poems. His mythological and romantic poems are quite simple. Yet they are complex not in matters of language or diction but in respect of thought.

About his style and diction, Yeats makes the following self-explanatory observations :

(1) "Style is almost unconscious. Contemporary lyric poems ......seemed too long, but an Irish preference for a swift current might be mere indolence......I planned to write short lyrics or poetic drama where every speech would be short and concentrated, knit by dramatic tension......I tried to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate, normal speech."

(2) "It was a long time before I had made a language to my liking : I began to make it when I discovered, some twenty years ago, that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and subject-matter. I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language."

(3) "When I wrote in blank verse I was dissatisfied......"

Yeats's early poetry is in the 19th century romantic tradition, and its style is in harmony with the dream atmosphere of his early world of magic and enchantment. The diction is easy, mild, laden with metaphors and epithets, and poetic dainty-footed words. Though coloured very much, the colours are weak and misty, in keeping with the tone that is wistful and nostalgic. The imagery there is profuse, and ornate word-pictures abound. The poetry is overhung with Pre-Raphaelite tapestry, and it speaks with a sweet, mellifluous, feminine voice. The poet thinks that words alone are certain good, and is carried away by their attractive charm.

Yeats, however, soon began to feel dissatisfied with this early style, and his early poems were revised and modified both in syntax and vocabulary, showing his change of attitude towards life. The revisions indicate his anxiety to bring his poetry nearer to life and to make it real and natural. The change is noticeable as early as the time of his poem *Adam's Curse* (1902), and it gets more and more pronounced with the passage of years. The poet is moving in the direction of common speech and is ever repeating his formula that a poet must use natural words in the natural order, and must endeavour to bring his language nearer to everyday speech. Poetic inversions are eschewed and the expressions acquire added precision and directness. In the later phase many of his verse lines are simply prose given a versified garb. The line—"Go watch the road between the wood and the tide" is an illustration of the spirit of prose with the quality of poetry still retained. He aimed at naturalness in the syntax and achieved it in later poetry.

In the matter of vocabulary also, there is ever an attempt to approximate to common speech. Archaisms and poeticisms are gradually shed and the words acquire a harder texture. Images now grow more definite and precise, solid and firm. The colouring too gets garish, and tone harsh and choppy and bitter. Prosaic words with a harsh, jarring sound like "couching", "ragged", "narrow", etc. are used to convey the harshness of reality. Edmund Wilson rightly points out that now "the soap bubble colours vanish", and his verse grows severe, definite, precise and harsh. All verbiage and superfluity is rigidly excluded with a corresponding gain in vigour and intensity. His diction acquires an almost Dantesque terseness and epigrammatic force. Density is a peculiar feature of his later poetry. "Often whole lines are clipped, and a cryptic, simpler but more effective line is substituted." His diction, after he gives up old mythological embroideries, apart from its bareness and nakedness emphasized by C. M. Bowra, becomes, indeed, sinewy and masculine, unadorned and plain. The structure grows bony and skeleton-like with a corresponding gain in richness and complexity.

Yeats is a metrical artist of consummate skill. He experimented with various metres and stanza-forms. "No modern poet," says Miss A. G Stock, "has mastered traditional stanza-forms of the kind that Chaucer handed down through Spenser to the Romantics : perhaps none of any time has written stanza at once so rich in music and so compact in thought and phrase." He contributed a great deal in freeing the English lyric from the tyranny of the iambic. He attained mastery in manipulating the irregular stanza. Often his stanzas follow a Donne-like pattern. Thought and emotion control the structure of the first stanza, and the subsequent stanzas follow the pattern laid down in the first. But this mastery, as stated earlier, is limited to the traditional metres only. Yeats keeps away from the modern *verse libre* and other verse experiments.

Yeats's lyrics possess an individual singing note. They are not songs, but their words have a musical lilt. The musical note in his verse is not imposed. It grows naturally from the words themselves which are carefully chosen with reference to their sense and sound both. In a passage, as follows—

"Though now it seems,
As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung
Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
And not a fountain, were the symbols which
Shadows the glory of the rich."

musical resonance and the turning of sensation into sounds have become a sort of conjuring trick ; he is performing rather than speaking. A sentence of Yeats is spoken thought developing as it moves. When at his best the lightness of song generates from assurance more than from simplicity, then the tongue finds speech for what is believed in the bones. Thus, in the *Words for Music Perhaps*, Crazy-Jane sings of his profoundest metaphysical vision with all the lightness of a song.

Yeats's great peculiarity in this field is the rhythmical animation which he says other poets of his time have not been able to maintain. He uses, like a pure artist, "wavering, organic rhythms" which are the embodiments of imagination. He also uses speech rhythms in the middle period, *e. g.*, in Byzantium poems. In his early poetry the vocabulary is rather strictly limited to what would suit the general tonality of later Victorian romanticism, and further limited in the effort to give the effect of Irish folk-literature. In his later poetry, Yeats cultivates subtler, more varied and more dramatically balanced cadences ; his vocabulary is greatly enlarged with terms both vernacular and learned. The metaphors are fresher and taken from a vastly wider range of reference, and the imaginative structure is both more firmly wrought and more spontaneous and natural in effect.

In his later and last phases of his poetic career, his language became racier, his rhythms quicker, and he could rise effortlessly to grandeur and sublimity. His absolute artistic integrity and sincerity compel him to express himself in a downright, trenchant manner, without any reservation or concealment. But there is a tendency to overwork hyperbolic words as 'passionate', 'rage', 'turbulent', 'frenzy', 'murderous,' 'blood and mire', etc., and this hyperbolism soon appears wearisome and hollow, and leads the poet into tremendous, nonsensical asservations. Another failure of Yeats as an artist is that he rarely chooses his words, phrases, idioms, metaphors and images from the contemporary scene.

Q 15. Compare and contrast William Butler Yeats and T. S. Eliot as poets.

Ans. The mountain of poetry in the present age has two highest peaks, each of which is occupied by Eliot and Yeats respectively. If Eliot was an Olympian in his calm dignity and his impenetrable reserve and disdain for the worldly concerns of the ordinary man's life, W. B. Yeats, an intellectual aristocrat to the tip of his fingers, was a centaur, haunted by his dreams and whisperings of voices from afar, yet firmly rooted in the earth and the 'rag bone shop' of his heart, throbbing with an exuberant passion for physical loveliness and the enchantments of the flesh.

Both Yeats and Eliot were men of erudite palate, well-versed in the philosophy and mysticism of the West and the religion of the East, only the favourite field of Yeats was more out of the way and Unchristian, because he lost faith in the traditional religion under the influence of the scientific agnosticism of the age and wandered all his life through the mazes of magical and occult societies and eventually fabricated his own system, which took final shape in *The Vision* of 1937. Eliot ultimately returned to the Catholic fold and laid its symbols and discipline under contribution for his later poetry. But the symbols of Yeats are more complex and protean, and naturally offer greater resistance to the inquiring reader.

In many respects, their views have striking similarities and Miss A. G. Stock has singled out the salient points in an interesting discussion. She has stated that both are intensely aware of man in history and of the soul in eternity, and both, at times, see history as an image of the soul writ large. Both see an uncongenial world disintegrating and an unknowable future taking shape in the surrounding dark. Both call in eternity to redress the balance of time ; and their images of the intersection of time and eternity are similar. For Eliot's 'still centre of the turning world' curiously corresponds with Yeats's gyres revolving round a timeless axis. Both have presented this precarious balance in the image of 'a dancer' and 'in music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all.'

Both were for the recognition of a solid tradition, with the only difference that Yeats was rooted in his people's tradition, while Eliot rejected his native culture and adopted that of Europe in the beginning and later settled comfortably in the religious tradition of the Catholic Christianity. Yet so far as poetry is concerned he was violently opposed to the romantic convention and broke away from it and made experiments with the diction, imagery and versification in full conformity with the contemporary poetry. But Yeats was 'the last romantic' who gradually broadened the scope of romantic poetry and vitalized its feeble sinews, tightening its texture till he attained an impersonal style, complex and close-knit, but free from the verbal contortions and dark imagery of disgusting industrialism which abound in the early poetry of Eliot. But in essence he remained a romantic genius, weaving his personal experience into his poetry and laying bare, dramatically not directly, the warmth, energy and even the lust of his heart, which vivify the personality of a rich and energetic genius actively engaged in the practical affairs of his country and sensitive to the charm of friendship and sensuous love. Eliot, the classicist, is wrapped in obscurity and locks up the secrets of his personal life in his own bosom. His range is narrower and he seems to care very little for the beauty and colour of the human life, which he is anxious to transcend. His message stresses the 'original sin' which the purgatorial fire of suffering alone can purge, otherwise there is no hope for man. But Yeats was disposed, with increasing intensity, to emphasize the joy born of tragedy and for him Hamlet and Lear were essentially gay creatures. That is why many critics are inclined to view W. B. Yeats as a more representative and greater figure than T. S. Eliot in the domain of modern poetry.

Below are quoted Yeats's own observations about T. S. Eliot, as Yeats expressed them in his Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1892-1935) which was edited by W. B. Yeats himself :

"Eliot has produced his great effect upon his generation because he has described men and women that get out of bed or into it from mere habit ; in describing this life that has lost heart, his own art seems grey, cold, dry. He is an Alexander Pope, working without apparent imagination, producing his effects by a rejection af all rhythms and metaphors used by the more popular romantics rather than by the discovery of his own, this rejection giving his work an unexaggerated plainness that has the effect of novelty. He has the rythmical flatness of *The Essay on Man*—later, in *The Wasteland*, amid much that is moving in symbol and imagery, there is much monotony of accent :

> "When lovely woman stoops to folly and
> Paces about her room again, alone,
> She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
> And puts a record on the gramophone."

"I was affected, as I am by these lines, when I saw for the first time a painting by Manet. I longed for the vivid colour and light of Rousseau and Courbet, I could not endure the grey middle-tint—and even today Manet gives me an incomplete pleasure ; he had left the procession. Nor can I put the Eliot of these poems among those that descend from Shakespeare and the translators of the Bible. I think of him as a satirist rather than a poet. Once only does that early work speak in the great manner :

> 'The host with someone indistinct
> Converses at the door apart,
> The nightingales are singing near
> The convent of the Sacred Heart,
> And sang within the bloody wood
> When Agamemnon cried aloud,
> And let their liquid siftings fall
> To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.'

Not until *The Hollow Man* and *Ash-Wednesday,* where he is helped by the short lines, and in the dramatic poems where his remarkable sense of actor, chanter, scene, sweeps him away, is there rhythmical animation."

These observations of Yeats about Eliot can make the contrast between the two quite obvious despite a number of similarities stated above.

APPENDIX

A CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT DATES

Yeats's Life

1865 : June 13, born near Dublin, eldest son of John Butler Yeats.

1875 : Sent to Godolphin School at Hammersmith.

1880 : The Yeats family left Bedford Park and settled in Howth County, Dublin.

1881 : Sent to Erasmus Smith School, Dublin.

1887 : Yeats's family returned and settled in London.

1888 : Joined the Hermetic Society and Theosophical Society established by Madame Blavatsky. Yeats introduced to Miss Maud Gonne, whom Yeats came to love passionately, and who so powerfully affected Yeats's love poetry. Yeats's connection with Maud Gonne broke off in 1893, which gave him an unbearable emotional shock. This shock lasted to the end of his life.

1891 : Yeats joined the Rhymers' Club, which led him to take interest in the French Symbolist Movement.

1898 : Became President of the Woolf Tone Memorial Association, through which he tried to unite the different political parties of Ireland.

1902 : Irish National Dramatic Society was established with Yeats as its President.

1917 : Yeats married to Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees.

1939 : Died January 28, 1939, at Cap Marten in France. After the Second World War, his dead body brought to Drumcliffe.

His Works

1889 : *Crossways.*

1893 : *The Rose.*

1899 : *The Wind Among the Reeds.*

1903 : *In The Seven Woods.*

1904 : *Collection of Plays.*
1910 : *The Green Helmet and Other Poems.*
1914 : *Responsibilities.*
1917 : *The Wild Swans at Coole.*
1921 : *Michael Robartes and the Dancer.*
1926 : *Autobiographies.*
1928 : *The Tower.*
1933 : *The Winding Stair and Other Poems.*
1935 : *A Full Moon in March.*

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5.	King Henry V	Dr. S. K. Banerji
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8.	Romeo and Juliet	Dr. S. K. Banerji
9.	Love's Labour's Lost	Dr. S. K. Banerji
10.	Antony and Cleopatra	Dr. D. K. Chopra
11.	Twelfth Night	J. Lahiri
12.	King Lear	B. L. Samo[illegible]ji
13.	King Henry IV, Part I	Dr. D. K. Cho[illegible]a
14.	Coriolanus	Dr. S. K. Banerji
15.	Julius Caesar	Mathur & Lahiri
16.	The Merchant of Venice	J. Lahiri
17.	A Midsummer Night's Dream	Dr. Sastri & Lahiri
18.	Much Ado About Nothing	Lahiri & Srivastava
19.	Measure for Measure	N. K. Das Gupta
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21.	The Winter's Tale	N. K. Das Gupta
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